

The Unusual 107th Congress

December 1, 2010

Interview #3

[This interview was conducted via Skype. Both the narrator and interviewer used webcams for video and audio delivery. Scott used a digital voice recorder to record audio from the computer speakers. Letchworth was in her home office in Florida and Scott was in her home office in Maryland. This interview picks up where the previous interview left off: What was a typical day like for you with Senator Lott as majority leader?]

Letchworth: It could be long and it tended to have bottlenecks in all sorts of different places. A lot of times Senator Lott would arrive in the office much earlier than me, to be perfectly honest, and want to know where I was and how soon I could get there. Basically because he liked to know what his day was going to be like, obviously, like anybody does at the beginning of their day. Typically at the end of the day he would decompress with me. We would talk about how it ended, did it end well, or did the floor situation end up a little, in a little bit of a mess. And then there were times when he would send me home or send staff on their way cleaning up a little bit of the problems, potentially being able to. So there was a lot of time, there was reason to report something new to him even though it may have looked like nothing could have happened between the close of last night and the beginning of the day. A lot of time there could have been a resolution. He would want to know, how did that get resolved? Or, a lot of times, things needed over night to percolate and free themselves. That happened, all in an effort to make sure that he knew the floor schedule, he knew basically what he thought the floor was going to look like so he could plan what he wanted to do next, especially if the White House was of the same party, as we were talking about at one point, you kind of wanted to have the same theme of the week. It was just all more of an effort to keep him informed, keep him in the personalities, make sure he understood the flavor of the floor and how the flow was going. He wanted to hear that a lot of times before the floor opened.

At the chamber, typically, the Senate typically came in at 9:30 or 9:15. I may be barely coming in, sort of flying in the door or not quite there. I would try to do as much as I could of that, with that, with him on the phone. And then of course, once I got there, be able to give [him] more detail as to what was going on. Again, all in an effort for him to open the day, he liked to open the day almost every day with the floor schedule, as you see most leaders do, and then give a little talk or just a snippet of what the floor would look like. You have to remember members are calling him potentially at the very

beginning of the day wanting to know when they can go home. They want to know how to plan their day also. The more he knew without getting into all of the details, the bigger the picture he could explain to other members as to what the day would look like, the better he felt he did with members. Of course, he wanted to give them as accurate answers as he could.

Scott: That opening day schedule that the majority leaders often give, is that really for the other members? What is the purpose of that?

Letchworth: It is for the other members for the most part, for them to plan their day. They have just as hectic of a problem as obviously any other leader or any other member of the Senate does as far as what does the day look like? Are they going to be able to attend the things they need to attend at night? Is their committee meeting going to be interrupted by votes? If you are a chairman and you want to get through a certain stage of your committee meeting, you might want to listen to what the chamber is going to do in the morning to find out if your committee meeting is going to be interrupted. If so, maybe you want to move around witnesses coming in at your committee meeting. Maybe you want to get the hardest part done first, that kind of thing. So there were myriad reasons why the leader would want to be the one to give the program of the day. Also, it obviously shows leadership, shows control of the body. Again, having said all of that, he also wanted to be as accurate as possible. He liked to get a second report from last night, a newer one, in case something had changed in the morning so that when he hit the chamber he had the most up to date and could be as knowledgeable as he could possibly be on what the day would look like.

Scott: When you had a debriefing with him at the end of the day, you just mentioned he would often send you home with maybe a task, something you needed to resolve later. What kind of tasks, what would that entail? Making a lot of phone calls?

Letchworth: It was typically a lot of phone calls. It might have involved, maybe by the time the chamber concluded for the day, that they were stuck on a particular amendment because we couldn't get a time agreement. Maybe it would be helpful if I let those tempers cool and call a couple of them, a couple of the members later on that evening and find out what if we had a meeting in the morning and what if we tried to work out a time agreement, would you be willing? Sort of let them think about the options overnight, too. It's just another way to further agreements and further more action and more ability for the leader to get more stuff done. It was typically phone calls and because my commute was long, I generally could do them in the car so by the time I got home my work a lot of time had been done. Yeah, there were typically follow-up phone

calls or set up meetings for tomorrow to try to resolve things that happened right before they went out.

Scott: It's striking to me how much work gets done for you in the car. You have this long commute and you are able to do it because of cell phone technology. What were people doing before they had that ability?

Letchworth: I remember working in those circumstances where you didn't have the cell phones. You waited until you got home. I can remember, to be honest, a lot more late night phone calls than when you had the cell phones and the e-mail and the BlackBerry, you didn't need to do that. You could do that on the fly. In some ways it didn't extend the days. In some ways it shrunk the work day ever so slightly because you could do things without having to wait to get home to get to a landline.

Scott: Last time we talked you mentioned briefly, in the conversation we were having about committee assignments, the challenges of the 107th Congress. We decided that we would put that off until we had another interview because there is so much to talk about. I wonder if you can tell us a little bit about your role in hammering out that power sharing agreement, that historic power sharing agreement of the 107th Congress?

Letchworth: Sure. It basically started right before the Christmas holidays. Senator [Tom] Daschle came to see Senator Lott. They had a very private, one-on-one meeting on, "When do you want to start negotiating it and how do you want to start negotiating?" Just getting the logistics down. But before that meeting was over, Senator Daschle handed Senator Lott a wish list of what he would like to see that power sharing agreement look like. If I remember correctly, within about 10 or 15 minutes of the two leaders—Senator Daschle came to Senator Lott's office for logistics, for no other reason than I just remember that and of course several of us were sitting outside the office wishing we had a glass to the door—Senator Lott made a copy of Senator Daschle's requests and handed it to me and said, "See what you think of all of these." If I remember correctly there were 10 or 12 different provisions. He wanted a memo on what was wrong or what was right, what was fair with all 12 of them within a certain period of time. And this was all around the Christmas holiday.

You had laptops back then and he had a fax machine. I took my laptop, what work I needed to do, faxed it to him. I had a fax at home, obviously. Faxed it to him at home. He would go over it, mark it up, fax it back to me. Even with some questions. I can remember two or three times, I can remember talking to him on Christmas Eve with version number three having been marked up a little bit and he wasn't quite sure what I meant with respect to one item or the next, trying to go over, basically trying to give him

all the information I could as to what was wrong or what was right or what was okay to give up and what wasn't okay. And if it wasn't okay, why wasn't it okay. What scenarios would that come back and really get him in trouble if he gave that power away. There was—obviously you were talking about a huge situation which really hadn't ever been done. So giving up any power at that point was huge. If you remember the scenario, Senator Daschle was the majority leader for about 15 days.

Scott: Right, right. Until President George Bush and Vice President [Richard] Dick Cheney were inaugurated.

Letchworth: Exactly. So you are talking about the 3rd or the 4th of January when the new Congress convened to the inauguration of the new president, for a 50-50 Senate, whichever party the vice president resided in. There were about 15 or 20 days when Senator Daschle could have made life very difficult. I'm not saying he threatened to, because he didn't. But he made it clear that he had the power to do a certain number of things and that he hoped that Senator Lott didn't push him to the point where he might have to use some of that power. That was the premise for, "Let's get this resolved and let's get it resolved quickly. Let's not make it ugly because everyone is going to have to live"—you know, 50-50 is not a wonderful scenario under anybody's circumstances, chairman or not.

Of course you had a second leg of this whole problem which was in some ways almost as big, which is how do the chairmen and how do the ranking members work this out? It starts with just the basics, the office space. Who gets the big chairman office? Then it kind of goes down to, okay, if you resolve that, you can't obviously split the office space. You have to resolve that. Then the money. There is a huge difference between chairman and ranking. In some cases percentages like 70/30. How do you resolve that? Shouldn't it be closer to 50/50? Well, not really because the chairman has to do so much more work than the ranking, but then how much more work? All of that was spinning around. In other words, you almost had 10 or 15 of these minor little negotiations going on behind the scenes like the Lott/Daschle negotiation was going on.

Chairmen and ranking of committees, some of them were cutting their own deals which were, in some ways, taking some of the power away from Senator Lott. He behind the scenes also tried to control some of those private deals that were being cut, let's say between the chairman of Judiciary [Committee] and the ranking. If they were off cutting their own deal, then that could potentially undercut Senator Lott's big global deal with Senator Daschle, especially if it dealt with, and it ultimately did deal with, the committee ratios of money. So he tried to discourage that, but that was hard to discourage because obviously if a chairman and a ranking felt like they had a really good working

relationship why shouldn't they be able to work out their own deal? But you can also see the reason why the majority leader and minority leader didn't want them doing that because they wanted to have the whole power of the whole package to be able to sell. That Christmas was very interesting. Lots of negotiations, lots of phone calls, not a lot of Christmas time for me that particular Christmas. We all knew it was just going to be one Christmas, so it was different. Then of course trying to get the two leaders to sign off on these various scenarios was difficult but then they both had to go lobby their own Conference to sell it to their own Conference. That's [when] a lot of the real heavy lifting came into play.

Scott: From everything I've read, Senator Lott's book *Herding Cats* as well as Senator Daschle's book, as you said it was a heavy lift, but it was a particularly heavy lift for Senator Lott because the Republicans had something to lose and the Democrats were gaining in this case. How did that work out? How did he get them to come together to agree to this organizing resolution?

Letchworth: I think the most important thing was we had a couple of very high level, very command performance meetings in the Library of Congress, in one of their ceremonial meeting rooms where Republicans still meet today when they have agenda meetings and retreats, where we really had to sell the whole picture. There was a plea by the majority leader. There was a plea by some of the other leadership. There was a plea in a much smaller role by myself as to why this was necessary. And then the chairmen had their own forum within that same meeting peppering all of us, "Well why do I have to give up 'x'?" Or, "Why can't I do 'y'?" And "Why can't this and why can't that?" And it all came down to, "We want to get things done. We want this new Republican Senate with this new president to be able to actually get things done." This was pre-9/11. We didn't know 9/11 was going to happen so shortly thereafter so we were eager to start getting things done and the idea—and it wasn't an idle threat—but the idea that Senator Daschle and many of his old chairmen, now soon to be ranking members, had said that if they thought the deal wasn't fair enough they were going to hold up things. Holding up the committee ratio resolution, holding up the committee appointment resolution, holding up all of that got nowhere. I was asked to do a report, for example, when was the latest that committee assignments were done in particular committees and found out, sometimes in the early '80s it was Easter, way back into April and May before anybody had committee assignments. That was something that nobody in the room wanted to see happen. But yet you didn't want to give up the farm to make sure that didn't happen. So there was really a fine line.

But the plea to get a lot done, we need to get a lot done, little did we know we needed to get a lot done because the world was going to change after 9/11. But there was

a real sense of, let's try to get a lot done, let's try to hit the ground running and we don't need to spend the first six months of this administration of this new Republican Congress, Republican Senate, for example, stuck on the logistics that the American people would not understand. They would not get why are we spending time on who gets the big office for the Foreign Relations Committee. That would seem petty to them. So there was a real sense of trying to be the bigger person and figure it out.

Scott: Senator Lott in one of his floor speeches about the power sharing agreement says, "I wouldn't say this is my preferred result, but I think it is a reasonable one with a serious dose of reality." Which I think nicely summed it up, that there was an unprecedented event that these two parties were going to have to work through.

Letchworth: Exactly. Again, because it was 50-50 you could have scenarios where nothing would get done. Nothing would get out of committee. Literally nothing. Well you can imagine. One party would almost have the power to cripple the Senate at any given time. So there needed to be a level of cooperation that hadn't existed for a long time, not for a long period of time. You had snippets of cooperation obviously throughout many Congresses in the past. But this one, you really saw the need for this to be around a lot. You needed to tap this level of cooperation a lot just to get the basics done. That's what Senator Lott was trying to say by it wasn't the best scenario in the world but under the circumstances it was pretty darn good.

Scott: It looks like one of the demands that Senator Daschle made early on was something about recognition, as in recognizing the leader on the floor because that obviously is so important in terms of controlling the legislative agenda. How did you guys handle that behind the scenes in order to eventually come to a resolution?

Letchworth: That was a big non starter from the get-go. That was a big one that Senator Daschle wanted and I think a lot of people understand the need or the real advantage to getting the right of recognition. It went from a lot of scenarios. It went from, it going back and forth, to one day one leader might have it, and that just wasn't workable. You needed one leader; you needed one leader to be able to drive the agenda. After all, somebody had to be the leader of the Senate. So that was basically a non-starter from the very get-go. There were some members though, that took a little negotiating to let them understand how important that was to hold on to because people were saying, "Why don't you just" ...that almost looked like something Lott was keeping for himself and he was maybe throwing a chairman's option out the window. I can remember having to talk to a couple of chairmen, to let them know this is not some little pet project for the leader, how important it really was. Obviously, how important it was, it was number one

on Senator Daschle's list, the sort of dual right of recognition or going back and forth right of recognition.

Scott: Those chairmen wouldn't have been able to move their legislation if they didn't have the right of recognition, right?

Letchworth: Exactly. But I think because a lot of them, or a few of them, had felt like they had got such a good working relationship with their ranking member that that wasn't going to be a problem, they would be able to get their bill out of committee, they would be able to get it on the floor, you know, forgetting that just because two men or two chairmen and a ranking work well doesn't mean the entire Senate is going to work well around it. That's the difference between being a committee chairman and being in the leadership. Your world is your committee, to a certain extent. The leader has to think of the world as a bigger world, the world of getting the legislation through in the United States Senate. That was a real tough one, in a lot of ways, for Senator Lott to get through to several of the chairmen.

Scott: How did the committee assignment process work out in that particular Congress after the power sharing agreement is reached? Was it more difficult? Your role in terms of this particular Congress, how different was it?

Letchworth: It was a lot different, because a lot of the members believed that majority was majority. Therefore, they should get a lot more and a lot more should be coming to them. When they basically figured out that it was sort of the same old seniority system that gave them the same old committee assignments, there were some that thought, well, I thought there would be more. I thought it would be different. That was a little dose of reality, also, because we didn't get huge ratios on any given committee, obviously. Just hearing that you are in the majority is one thing. But when you really think of the nuts and bolts as to what it actually boils down to in your world, say a chairman or a ranking, it can be a rude awakening after the champagne has been popped and after the thought process settles in. It was a little more difficult because people felt like—the Republicans felt like they should have gotten more. We couldn't have given them more; there were so many slots to give. But there were some that felt like we could have gotten more.

Scott: What was the final resolution in terms of committee assignments? It was 50-50, 50-50 staff and 50-50 office space?

Letchworth: No it was a little different than that. I'd have to look up the actual ratio. It seems to me it was an odd ratio. I'll look it up for you so that I don't error. It

wasn't exactly 50-50. I want to say 48-52 or something like that. I'll look it up and get back to you.

Scott: So you finally agree to this unprecedented power sharing agreement and then not too long after that Senator Jim Jeffords decides to declare himself an Independent and says that he'll caucus with the Democrats, effectively giving them the majority. What happens in your position as party secretary when you hear this news and the ensuing scramble after that?

Letchworth: We had some head's up that this was going on. Senator Lott, as a matter of fact, was good friends with Senator Jefford's personal secretary. There were some inside pleas. There was some negotiating going on behind the scenes to try to make sure that Senator Jeffords did not in fact do this. We actually called a meeting of all the chairmen and had them meet with Senator Jeffords off the floor and had them talk about the fact that they hadn't been chairmen, they would never have the chance to be chairmen again. "This is my one chance in the sun. Don't take it away from me." Give their own personal plea to him as to what this would do to their agenda, for example, of every single major committee. We had a couple of days to lobby him, if you want to call it that, before this happened. When everything failed, there was a lot of hope at each stage that this pleading or negotiating with him would result in him deciding to stay with the Republicans. When it didn't, ultimately we knew it wouldn't. We had the whole recess, the upcoming I believe it was Memorial Day, wasn't it?

Scott: I think so. Before he makes the—

Letchworth: He had turned in the letter to the Senate, which was supposed to go to the vice president. He turned it in right before the adjournment of the Senate for, I believe, Memorial Day, and made it effective when the Senate reconvened. In other words, we had that 8, 10 days, to try to figure out what that meant. But yeah, that was another complete scramble, sort of flip-flopped the agreement over to the other side. But at that point I think Senator Lott looked a little more like a hero because he didn't get the farm, but he didn't have to give up the farm in that respect. But then there was a lot of, how did this happen? How did Senator Jeffords feel so left out or disgruntled, or whatever adjectives you want. I think there have been a lot of stories told about what led up to that, but it was pretty devastating. Talk about take the wind out of your sails, it was pretty devastating. But enough time to be able to deal with it because he did let us know right before the recess and then we had basically the recess to regroup and figure out how to move the deck chairs again around.

Scott: There was criticism at the time that the power sharing agreement was reached, and especially after Jeffords left the party, that Senator Lott had given away too much by agreeing to this power sharing agreement, which basically said if anything changes, then this agreement can be rewritten and redone. One party can gain an advantage if anything changes in the Senate makeup. Do you think that that criticism was warranted?

Letchworth: No. For the most part, no. I think what people did not believe or did not have a picture of, and because I had seen past Congresses where they couldn't get anything done until the committee assignments were done and the ratios were done, how useless that Congress was. How absolutely useless it turned out to be. It set a tone for almost the entire Congress. If you look in history at Congresses where it took until March, April, May to get the committee assignments done, that Congress really didn't have a lot of flair or a lot of bang to it after that. It was kind of a struggle. That is the one thing that Senator Lott did not want to do, a) to the Congress, but b) to this new president. He didn't think that was fair. He felt like he owed more to the new president than to scrap around again for it to look like we were fighting over who gets the bigger chair or the bigger office or the office with the window. That's the way we thought it would look like to the American people for the most part because basically we were able to drive our own agenda. Which was really the most important part, because the real estate, although it is, there's a comfort level, you know how it works, so it was important. But the bigger picture, he felt like he got a good deal for the bigger, the greater good. He felt like he got the best deal.

I thought that was a little unwarranted, but not unusual for the Senate. It really was not and probably still is not. There's always sort of griping behind the scenes and, "If I were there I could have done it better," or "If it were my job I could have done it better." But for the most part, most people were happy. Now, with Senator Jeffords jumping, that sort of reenergized that whole feeling again. Whether it was warranted or not, almost doesn't matter. It gave it life. You know how that works. It gave it life. So you had to struggle through all of that all over again.

Scott: As party secretary and the eyes and the ears for the leader, do you tend to hear a lot of that griping? If there's griping going on, are you generally privy to it? You want to be privy to it I would guess.

Letchworth: You do. I would say that you are privy to probably two-thirds of it. There's probably a third of it that, a) they don't want you to know for obvious reasons; and, b) that maybe the gripers just want to let off some steam. So you almost don't want to know that because you don't want to have him overreact or have us overreact to it.

There's some natural griping that you want to let that occur and let the pressure cooker let off some pressure. When it reaches a level when it's not just noise, that it really is true pressure that can affect the floor, then you do obviously want to be included. Typically the senators that are doing the griping will let you in at that point. They'll let you know, "Elizabeth you are going to have a problem," because the overall picture in any party, whether it be Republican or Democrat, is that you want your problem solved, but you don't want your problem to become a whole party problem if it can be solved. So you have to let somebody know to try to solve it. At some point you do get brought in.

Scott: Did Senator Lott have some fires to put out after the power sharing agreement was reached? Were there cases where he did have to step in because things rose to that level, or were people just grumbling under the surface?

Letchworth: There was mostly grumbling under the surface, for the most part. I can remember a couple of fires with a couple of chairmen that he had to literally go sit down, have meetings with. I would have to sit down at the same time with a staff director, their staff director, and explain, "This is why we are in the situation that we are in and this is why this had to be done this way. Please try to understand it." What you did in that case was you painted a scenario that could easily happen if you hadn't taken care of whatever the situation was and how that could harm them in one particular way or another.

Scott: That's interesting that you brought up the staff director. How much of your efforts at making sure everyone is happy have to filter down to the staff level and not just—

Letchworth: It definitely starts with the staff director. If the staff director can sell it to the rest of the staff, that is three-fourths of the battle. A lot of times, to be honest, if the staff director can get it in a clearer picture, he or she can sell it to the chairman or the ranking member. To a large extent he or she typically does work together on all the bills. That chairman and staff director relationship is not that different from the leader and the secretary. A level slightly below that but the same sort of thing. The staff director knows all of his or her member's committee. Knows what to expect. [Unintelligible] That kind of thing. So it's sort of a smaller [unintelligible] of the big Senate floor picture.

Scott: How well did you get to know the staff directors?

Letchworth: You get to know them pretty well. You meet with them almost on a daily basis. Remember, the bills that they report out of the committees are very important to them. They may not be as important to the leader, but to them [unintelligible] lobbying

for them. [unintelligible] It's constant. They wanted to know what their problems were [unintelligible] and ask them [unintelligible] whatever the situation was. So it's constant communication with the staff director.

Scott: Are those generally, the staff directors you worked closely with, are they generally people you had known? Staff directors tend to also stay in the Senate for many years, so they were people you probably had worked with for years.

Letchworth: Exactly. A lot of them I had grown up with, if you want to look at it that way. We might have started very early. I remember them being an intern or I remember them starting out at a lower level, as did I. Sure. That all goes back to that ability to have relationships, to make good strong relationships where as they grew and you grew, you know, you each kind of grow up together. You're right, in most cases staff directors don't just parachute in from middle America. They have done all of the levels and all of the rungs of the positions leading up to that. Typically I knew most of them very, very well.

Scott: How did things change after Jeffords jumped?

Letchworth: Well it changed pretty drastically right away. It really did. There was a little bit of a feeling of we're in control now and we're going to do things our way. Although obviously and typically you couldn't do too much different because the Senate was basically still 50-50 for all intents and purposes. It really was not—the membership didn't really change. One person changed to make it change but the members were still the same. So it was a lot of almost hot air to a certain extent. But there was a lot of trepidation that it would change drastically. But when it came right down to it, literally right down to it, it really didn't change that much. Of course 9/11 made it change drastically for a whole set of reasons. There really wasn't a tremendous amount of time between Senator Jeffords leaving and then our whole world as we know it changing. So it was a lot of "I'll show you" conversation until oops, everybody is having to get along for the sake of the country.

Scott: It really was just a few months, I think the next organizing resolution was in June of 2001, so it's really just a few months later.

Letchworth: June 6 is when I was elected minority secretary. I was looking on the wall to check the date of the resolution, June 6th.

Scott: Okay.

Letchworth: Of course, 9/11 is 9/11. You got to remember you are out all of August. So you're right, we really had a little bit of June and of course they took off for July and so you probably had, I can look it up. It was probably four to six weeks. It was not a long time at all.

Scott: Where were you on 9/11?

Letchworth: I was heading into Washington, D.C., to clean out my office, to be perfectly honest.

Scott: That's right.

Letchworth: Get some last minute books and boxes, all of that.

Scott: Because you retired in July, right?

Letchworth: Actually my last day was August 31.

Scott: Okay.

Letchworth: So 11 days before 9/11. I had basically done most of the office cleaning but I was heading into the office to get the last leg of the moving when I got a phone call from our daughter-in-law that said basically, "Aren't you planning on going into the office today? Don't. You need to turn on your TV."

Scott: What did you do? Did you continue? Did you go back?

Letchworth: I turned around and went back and called my staff, who had been my staff up until 10 days ago. I found Dave Schiappa, the new secretary for the minority, asked him where he was, and he told me where he was and they had hunkered down in such and such a place and that everybody was accounted for. And where was the leader, and all of that. We stayed in contact the whole rest of the day, really out of concern for these folks that had been my staff for many, many years. And concern for the whole country, obviously. But in my little world, it was kind of the folks I knew at the time.

Scott: What made you decide to retire?

Letchworth: I think a lot of members of Congress will tell this kind of story. It's the inability, to not be able to plan, to not be able to plan your day, your evening. To not be able to make any kind of plans in the evening, any kind of family time during the

week was just—it's almost impossible to try to plan and the more you plan the more you disappointed whoever you planned. At that point I was married with some teenage children, step-children, that were in our house and we were raising and I just didn't think it was fair to them, I didn't think it was fair to my husband and I wanted a shot—after all I had been there for 26 years—I wanted a shot to be a mom and to be a wife and to have a normal—I'm not necessarily saying I wanted a 9 to 5, but a little more certainty. I think if you talk to a lot of members of Congress, it's the uncertainty that really drives them crazy. That hasn't gotten too much better.

Scott: No.

Letchworth: If anything it's gotten worse. That, to me, will drive away a lot of good talent because I saw it drive away a lot of good talent. I can think of five or six senators off the top of my head that left because that was a frustration of theirs. Anybody that is a time management nut or is just very conscientious about using their time wisely will find the Senate a huge waste of time. I think you've heard that with the freshman class—they're not now freshman but with what used to be the freshman class, I guess they now would be the sophomore class—especially on the Democratic side echoing this over and over and over.

Scott: Yes.

Letchworth: They are very frustrated because they don't understand why so much of this is just sit around and wait. If you work on the floor, and I did for 26 years, I spent 26 years sitting around and waiting! I felt like it was time to do something else where I could control a little more of my time and give more of my time where I wanted to give it instead of having broken promises all the time that you'd be at different things. So that was the defining factor. I had made the decision before the 50-50. My—

Scott: Oh, okay. So in 2000 you had made the decision that you would retire the next year?

Letchworth: Yes, and I had actually planned on going down to see Senator Lott after the election in 2000, visit him in Mississippi and let him know that this was my plan. Let him know that I thought Dave Schiappa would be a great replacement and let him know that I thought everything would work out fine. Of course that didn't work out very well. You had the 50-50 and you had that crazy election where the Supreme Court had to step in and all of that. So that smooth little passing of the baton didn't work too well. My plans didn't go off as planned. I didn't make it down in November because there was too much in flux. I believe it was in the middle of November when then

president-elect Bush came to meet with Senator Lott in the office. He met with the leadership and I was lucky enough to be one of the staff to meet with him. It was still in a state of flux. I think most people believed it would eventually be resolved but it was still in a state of flux. Was the inauguration going to go off as planned or was that going to be moved around? All of that was still up in the air. The whole time I'm in all of these meetings, I have to tell the leader at some point I'm leaving because I still had in my mind leaving in 2001. But I wanted to let all of this settle. Let his life as majority leader settle. That threw my timing off a little bit. It obviously worked out fine.

Scott: Did the presidential election, the uncertainty over the presidential election, did that affect you in the Senate at all? Your job or Senator Lott's position as majority leader? How much were you just bystanders or were there things that you had to do?

Letchworth: We were definitely very interested bystanders. Very interested because that decided who was going to be in the controlling party. We couldn't do anything about it, other than just plan. So we planned almost for both scenarios, putting more emphasis on being in the majority, but also realizing that if we're in the minority we'll be a strong minority and we can push for this. You almost had two tracks going.

Scott: Was President George Bush the first president that you had met?

Letchworth: No. I had been lucky enough to meet all of them, going back to President Nixon. I had been able to meet them all in various scenarios and in various situations. I can remember meeting him [George W. Bush] the first time, Andy Card was with him when he came to the leader's office. The presumed leadership was sitting around in a greeting oval of sorts. He came around the room and said hi to everybody and the staff, we were holding up the sides of the walls, as I like to call it, and he came and shook each one of our hands and asked us, "What do you do? What are you going to be doing?" He was doing that kind of thing. I remember asking him how his girls were. He said they were very mad at him because they had shut him out. They weren't answering BlackBerry or any of his e-mails. [Scott laughs] It upset him. It honestly seemed to upset him.

Basically he was planning for being the next president, waiting for everything to fall in place and gave us one of these: "I look forward to working with all of you. This will work out well. Everything will work out. Dust will settle and we need to be ready to hit the ground running." That really empowered Senator Lott to stick with what he had always wanted to stick with, which was we need to produce good products from the very beginning. We can't have a session or a Congress that is stuck in the mud from the very

beginning. That reinforced the whole idea that we really needed to get the power sharing agreement done and get it done as quickly as possible.

Scott: Were you working with President-elect Bush's transition team to... were you thinking about legislation already? Were you working closely with any folks on his team to envision what you would be able to accomplish in this new Congress?

Letchworth: Once the Supreme Court came down with their ruling, then yes. Those type meetings started to happen. They started to happen more at the staff level on the committees. In other words, staff directors would be starting to have that kind of thing. The party secretary isn't necessarily involved in every one of those but you also ask and request to get a briefing on how the meeting went and what that particular staff director thought the level of interest was for his or her agenda. Does the White House like a lot of their agenda? Are they going to like a lot of their agenda? Are they going to want to do it early or late? You wanted to try to get another answer to the same briefing from someone from the White House to make sure the stories matched. [Scott laughs] You have to think about it. The chairman or the staff director a lot of times might color the story a little more towards their favor, it's just human nature. So you wanted to double check and make sure that everything you heard was in fact the feeling of everybody in the meeting. I guess that's really what you were doing. All of this is not a veil of suspicion so much as you want the best information you can get for the leader. So you did start a little bit of that after the Supreme Court results. All in an effort to hit the ground running to start getting a new agenda unveiled and for that Senate to start working with the president.

Scott: Was it an exciting time?

Letchworth: Very exciting. Extremely exciting. In part because it took so long to get over election night. For everybody it did. It was either very exciting or very disappointing for basically most people in the country. I think there were a lot of people who always felt like it was—they were robbed a little bit, so to speak. I think that led to the disgruntled-ness toward the Bush administration that started out so strong and that never really let up. It's almost like he could never do anything right. If anything went wrong it seemed to be blamed on him. I think that whole mode started from the way he actually got the presidency. That's the way our system worked. I felt that a little bit on the floor at times.

Scott: Oh, really?

Letchworth: I can remember almost from the very beginning listening to Democratic senators, either actually in speeches or on the floor, not in necessarily private conversations but in conversations between one or two or three, that you might walk by and hear or they may actually sort of include you in it: "This lame duck president. He lucked into it." Almost like he wasn't taken completely seriously and I think that wounded him from the very beginning.

Scott: Did Senator Lott ever mention anything about that? Did that weaken your agenda in any way?

Letchworth: [It did] not. Not at all. I never heard that from Senator Lott and I didn't hear it from most Republicans. There were a few Republicans that you might hear that from but mostly from the Democratic side of the aisle. You can sort of understand them. Al Gore was their colleague for many, many years. It was like their side of the aisle had one taken from them. So there was a little bit, maybe a little more personal, as far as that was concerned, with some of the senators on the Democratic side of the aisle.

Scott: Do you think, getting back to that point you made about the uncertainty of a Senate schedule, especially if you are on the floor as the party secretary, is there any way to change that? Do you think that is inherent in the Senate as an institution? Do you think that things could be changed to make it a little easier on people?

Letchworth: Senator Baker, when he became majority leader, tried. That was one of the first things he tried to do was to implement a little more certainty. He really tried to make the Thursday night be the late night. He tried to stack things up so that the latter part of the week was more of a late night. So if you wanted to do the fundraiser, or the dinner with your wife, or the soccer game with your child, Mondays or Tuesdays or maybe even Wednesdays you might be able to get away with it. He tried that. For the most part it can work. But you can't live by it, literally live by it, and that's the frustration. The reason you can't live by it is because that gives the minority, or somebody that wants to object to your agenda, power.

Remember you have 100 senators that in theory have the ability to stand up and block something at any given moment. If you know that Tuesday at 7:00 is the bewitching hour and that the leader has pretty much said every Tuesday we won't go beyond 7:00, you have a goal. If you can just talk beyond 7:00, you can stop whatever it is. So that gives you extra power that you wouldn't have. The leader has to know, "I can live by this to a certain extent but I can't die by it because I can harm the agenda by sticking with it too vigorously." So that's why there will always be that level of uncertainty. There always has to be. If you literally stick by every Tuesday at 7:00, there

will be no more votes, then anybody who wants to stop anything knows they'll just have to talk until 7:00 on Tuesday and they've succeeded.

Scott: So in every Congress is there always one senator you think who is willing to do that? You can't get everybody on board in this new family-friendly Senate structure?

Letchworth: Exactly. There seems to be somebody to fill that role pretty much from every Congress. I'm not sure that's a bad role to have filled. It does serve as the check and balance for all included. You hope that that person is reasonable. You hope that he or she doesn't pull the stunt, if you want to call it that, over and over and over, that they reserve it for really important measures. But it is almost looked at by the leadership as, "I've got your back." In a strange kind of way it is. It's a love-hate relationship. There are times you love the guy or gal doing it because it might have gotten you off the hook. Of course there are times when you are really angry at the person for pulling the stunt. Sometimes more often than not you are secretly very happy that that position is being filled and that it's being filled by somebody who might be a friend of yours more so than you want to publicly say.

Scott: That problem eventually leads to you deciding to do something else with your life. You were honored with a Senate resolution. You were honored for your service and Senator Lott mentioned that you had plans to start a golf course with your husband.

Letchworth: We did. We moved to South Carolina and ran a golf course. Bought a golf course. It was an 18-hole golf course with a big club house and I thought we were just going to enjoy that and for the most part we really did. But I found out very quickly golfers [can be] very protective [of their golf course]. They can be very territorial. It quickly turned into a situation where I was trying to please a bunch of very, very, um, old-fashioned golfers. Trying to please them like you would senators. I can remember several times in any given week seeing current members of this golf course having issues with something we did or didn't do and sort of equating them, "Well you sound like Senator so and so and you sound like Senator so and so."

I can remember talking to Senator [Bill] Frist pretty soon after I left but came back for an event and he wanted to know how things were going. I said they were going pretty well but I didn't think that golfers were going to be that hard to deal with. He said he had talked to a friend of his that owns a big country club in Tennessee and he said that he thought that the head of the country club in Tennessee had a tougher job than he did as far as trying to please people. [Scott laughs] You know at that point I agreed with him. It wasn't as easy as I thought it would be. We ran into some issues, really just with the

whole logistics of everything. It was very much a full-time job. One that we loved but one that I found out I didn't want to do for the rest of my life.

Scott: [Laughs] How long did you do it?

Letchworth: We ended up keeping the club for two years and sold it and moved to Central Florida where I started picking up on doing a little more of the consulting back in D.C. I had done some of that early on at the club. I had taken on a couple of small clients, a South Carolina client, the Peach Council. I had done some work with them, for example. I kept my hand in the Senate and how the Senate was doing and the personalities and what not, even though I was running a country club in the South. So that when we decided, let's move on and do other things, it was natural to beef up that end of what I had already been doing on a part-time basis anyway. That's where we ended up where we are now.

Scott: I wondered especially with 9/11 happening so soon after you had officially left, that must have been incredibly difficult to know what your former colleagues were going through and yet not be a part of that environment anymore?

Letchworth: It was. It was difficult knowing that they were going to have to make huge decisions, hoping, praying that they could come to agreement on, you know, just everything that was in front of them. Knowing that they were scratching each other's eyes out within a couple of weeks beforehand and certainly at the beginning of that year, really at each other's throat in many, many different ways. It's amazing how well they did come together. I remember that picture of all of them on the Capitol steps singing God Bless America. I can remember feeling every inch of that, every minute of that, saying that is real. They are feeling that. Please let them continue to feel that feeling and they did. Obviously they did for, some people would argue was it six months, was it a year, but they got a lot done. They created Homeland Security, that huge department, for example, [and] the TSA [Transportation Security Administration], which we love to hate right now [both laugh]. The TSA was created then. All of that took a huge bipartisan agreement to get that done. Obviously that was not what Republicans, traditional Republicans, had wanted to do, was to grow government and certainly not grow it that large. Certainly not grow it overnight. But they had to come to the realization that maybe we do need to grow it. I mean there was a lot of give and take.

It was pleasant to watch, even from afar. You went away having watched the TV maybe for the day—Interesting enough this country club in South Carolina, obviously it was a golf course so it had many TVs going. One of them always had the United States Senate on. [Scott laughs] Most people came in and didn't know why we had it on. Most

of them were looking for the golf channel. But this particular golf course almost always had one TV on which had the Senate. In other words, as the golf course would close for the day and the TV would get turned off and I would be monitoring what the Senate was doing there was typically a smile on my face that boy, they really are getting through a lot of this and it's tough but they were getting through it all for the benefit of trying to keep us safe and keep another 9/11 from happening.

Scott: Did you have a difficult time, or was it easy, to transition from that constant schedule with the Senate to a different kind of day?

Letchworth: It was very easy. It came just so natural. I was so pleased that it came that naturally because if you think about it, ever since I was 15 years old I had been dependent on somebody else's time clock. I didn't have my own time clock. I then transitioned into a country club's time clock which is from dawn to dusk. It was already a long day and then if you add in an hour or two on the end of the day once it got dark, it made for a long day. But we loved the business. We loved being around the people for the most part. Knowing that the day was going to be long, it's different when it's your day. It's different when it's your day versus somebody else's ability to affect your day. I guess it's the same pride that everybody takes that owns a small business. You work extra hard when you know it's your business and this was our business. So it wasn't that hard at all. I was surprised at myself that it wasn't any harder than it was to transition away. Again, it's all I had ever known.

I think that was my sign that I was ready. I can remember sitting on the floor listening to some of the tributes which were all wonderful and listening to the resolutions that were being done and I remember this little voice in my head kind of saying, "Elizabeth you should be crying your eyes out." I'm one that cries at parking lot dedications. [Scott laughs] I wasn't even getting weepy. The take away from that to me was that I was ready. I was probably more ready than I knew I was because it was wonderful, it was warming my heart, I was loving hearing it, but I was ready obviously because it wasn't tearing me up to do it. It was a pretty natural transition.

I was so grateful to be able to tell Senator Lott that I thought Dave Schiappa would be a great replacement. You always, you know anybody wants to be able to do that when they leave a position, especially one that they love, the people that they love, you don't want to leave them high and dry. You don't want to leave them in a lurch. I had a real positive sense as far as that was concerned too. That made it easier.

Scott: One thing we haven't talked about, another historic event during your time as party secretary, is the impeachment trial of President Clinton. I wonder what your role might have been in that whole process?

Letchworth: That was a very interesting time to say the least. The historic part of it, that is what it is. But trying to make sure that the Republican leader, the majority leader at the time, remained the majority leader in a situation where he wasn't even really allowed to speak was sort of tough. It started out when it became very apparent that this was going to make it from the House and that we were going to have this document basically in front of us in January and they came in, if you remember in January, they had a lame duck session. The Senate did not that year. So the lame duck session for them was to deal with the impeachment proceedings and we were not in. So when we came back in, that's what we had facing us. So a lot of that Christmas holiday was spent going to meetings. It was spent going to meetings learning about what the last impeachment trial looked like. It did not have TV cameras, did not have anything, and very little history. Very little history as the background as to what it really looked like in the chamber. You had to picture it in your mind.

A very important role for the leader was that the Senate still remain in his eyes as far as he would be in control as majority leader. Yet that was a difficult role to try to create for him because he was a juror and jurors weren't allowed to speak. In order for them to speak they had to actually submit their questions on little cards to the counsel. They had to write them down and the counsel would read them. Yeah, so that inability to speak—you try to tell a lot of Republican senators or 100 senators that they are not allowed to speak in a chamber that they spend all of their life in, that was sort of a tough order. We spent a lot of time in meetings learning about the other impeachment trial, the last impeachment trial of Andrew [Johnson] was about and how it sort of played out. And then how we could orchestrate, how we could have a role in this without breaking any kind of tradition.

We decided that he would open the Senate's day, outlining the Senate, there wouldn't really be in the impeachment proceedings but they kind of would be. There would be that fine line, almost like this in an introduction to the impeachment proceedings although we never actually said that. He said, you know the Senate—he would outline the day and go through a normal, if you want to say, leader-type opening remarks and then sit down and that was the chief justice's cue to say, "Now the proceedings have started." But we didn't have any formal words to that effect.

There were definitely some negotiations between Senator Lott and the chief justice as far as how the day was going to look like. I've got several pictures of me



"Elizabeth Letchworth: Page, Floor Assistant, Republican Party Secretary (1975-2011)," Oral History Interviews, October 5, 2010 to March 21, 2012, Senate Historical Office, Washington, D.C.



talking to the chief justice outlining what the day was supposed to look like as far as the majority leader. How much did he want to get done? At what level did he want to stop? That was very interesting. Typically, a couple of times during any given day, the leader would call me over and I reverted back to my page days. I would huddle right next to him as if I were a page and he would say, "Why don't you check with some of the older senators and see if we need a bathroom break." [Scott laughs] There was no other way of learning that.

Scott: That's right.

Letchworth: So I would huddle over to a group of senators and say, "Do you think we should—?"; "How about if we take a break in an hour?" maybe somebody would say. So I'd come back with sort of a collective, "Maybe we should try to break for an hour." I would then go up to the chief justice and say, "What do you think of breaking in about an hour?" Now he had a back issue, an issue with his back. And we had already had several meetings with his staff and actually with the chief justice himself about the fact that this back issue was going to cause him some problems. He wasn't going to be able to sit for long, long stints of 8, 10, 12 hours. We needed to know that up front and how was he going to cue us as to whether he felt like he needed to take a break. We created a little bit of a behind-the-scenes system and one of them was me sort of crawling around on the floor, not literally but almost, taking the temperature of several members, finding out who was ready for a break and checking with him and then he would announce that we were going to take a recess, that the impeachment trial would be in recess, just as a judge would do.

But then we sort of created a new role for the leader, when we came back out of those, into those impeachment proceedings, Senator Lott would then announce again. We would be back in the Senate for that little two-minute time frame and the leader would be able to announce what the Senate was going to be doing, how far along we were going to get for the day. He would sit down and that would be the cue for the chief justice to say, without announcing, that we are back in order. It was assumed that the impeachment trial was to resume again. That was very different obviously, because control of it was under a completely different set of circumstances and set of rules. But Senator Lott was very emphatic that he stayed in control of it as best he could.

So there were a lot of meetings behind the scenes on how to cut deals, on how to get certain agreements, on how much time we should spend on this evidence and how much time should we spend on that evidence. If you remember, there were several consent agreements on how all of that worked out. That was done basically under the helm of Senator Lott, basically with me in the middle of it. But I'm not a lawyer. Senator

[Donald] Nickles [R-OK] hired a lawyer and Senator Lott hired a lawyer for that purpose. It was the three of us, the two lawyers and myself and the staffs that worked behind the scenes as well as, if we came up with something we thought that would work we would bounce it up to the senators to see if they thought that was something that was workable. Many of them had been lawyers, had been trial lawyers, so a lot of their trial lawyer old role came out in them. There were a lot of meetings in the cloakroom over these consent agreements. A lot more senators were involved personally in these consent agreements that typically were normally not involved in consent agreements of the past, even if it was their bill. In other words, if it was their bill and something they had written and something that they had pulled all the way through committee, they still relied on the staff to do the intricacies of the consent agreement, but not this. They wanted to get involved. I can remember many senators sitting in the cloakroom that normally would have been the roles of the staff, they played their staffs to shepherd and make sure the agreements were what they thought they should be.

Scott: Do you think they were so closely involved in this case because of the—

Letchworth: Historic nature of it?

Scott: The fact that this was historic in itself and they were very invested in doing things the right way. Why do you think they wanted to be more personally involved?

Letchworth: I think that for the most part. I think they all believed and they all felt that this was a duty above and beyond. They need to take this so, so very seriously. You didn't hear hardly any griping. You didn't hear hardly any complaining about, "I've really got to get out of here. I've got to go to 'x, y, z,'" which you typically heard during any given day. That's sort of the grumbling that's going on on any given day because you've got 100 men and women that have 100 different personalities and different schedules and different wants and needs. I guess I shouldn't refer to it as griping so much as just letting people know that you've got issues with the timing. You rarely heard that during this whole proceeding, which I thought was a special tribute to how much they did take this role seriously. That the child's soccer game or the dinner with the wife or whatever was coming second and we didn't have to hear it. We didn't need to hear it, it wasn't important. What we were hearing was important.

It was also helpful that we were able to have food brought into the two cloakrooms so that they didn't—We purposefully tried to make sure that they didn't drift very far. They didn't have to go off campus to get lunch or dinner for example. We would try to have food available in the cloakrooms. Just more logistics to try to keep this all in the best frame of mind, easiest for everybody to deal with because it was very

cumbersome for how many days was it? I could go look it up. I'll put it in there, I don't remember. But that was a lot of days when you literally saw them from bell to bell. You saw them from breakfast to dinner.

Scott: Which is very unusual.

Letchworth: Extremely unusual. Again, you didn't hear hardly any griping and you saw a lot of personal participation.

One of the most unique circumstances that I remember surrounding the impeachment trial was when Senator Lott decided that we needed to go into a special session and that the cameras were going to be turned off. The chief justice was going to be asked to leave. The managers, the House managers and President [Bill] Clinton's lawyers were going to be asked to leave. Basically the senators talked about the severity of what was going on. And how they were processing it. That was a lot, without going into a lot of detail, that was a lot of this discussion. The microphones were off. People walked into the well and started talking. It was a lot like the House of Representatives. Walked down into the well and just started talking. Somebody else would get up and say "I agree with you" and they'd walk into the well and sort of follow. It was probably the most unique time I remember of the 26 years I was in the Senate was that time. A lot of it was personal reflection and I say that as in conversations like, "Boy I've screwed up before. But for the grace of God this isn't me." Those kinds of stories. Obviously nobody was saying they were president and nobody was saying—

Scott: Right.

Letchworth: But they were all saying we've all been, or a lot of us have been in very precarious situations, remember that. There were a lot of heartfelt speeches made at that point too.

Scott: Why do you think Senator Lott thought that was an important thing to do?

Letchworth: I think he thought it was necessary. I think he thought it was necessary to let the steam out at that point. I think he believed at that point that the debate was getting, not the debate so much as the proceedings, were getting too partisan. People were starting to be able to get in that protected politician kind of mode where, "This is my president. I need to protect him. This is all about politics." He needed to bring it back to, "No, no this is about breaking the law. This is about right and wrong. This is not about what political party anybody—" So he decided, let's all talk about us being us. Us being men and women, maybe in politics, but we've been whatever we've been in our other

lives and just let it go at that. I think it was helpful to bring it all back to this is a role we have to play that should be outside of politics. It should be void of politics.

Scott: Were those consent agreements easier to reach than normal consent agreements about legislation, for example, because people understood the solemnity of the event? They understood how important it was?

Letchworth: What some of the Republicans wanted out of the consent agreements were not easy to get done and I think that was in part because obviously President Clinton's counsel wanted the best scenario they could paint. They were able to find one or two Democratic senators that would carry that water. We knew we could only push so far on some of this stuff. One for example, I don't think I'm talking out of school, was to have Monica Lewinsky testify. If so, would she come in the chamber? If so, would she be by videotape? How would you do the videotape? All of that kind of ...

Then what is the visual of that going to look like? Did President Clinton's lawyers think that would be too over the top for the American people to deal with? You had a lot of that swirling around which I was not familiar with at all. All of those intricacies I was not familiar with. That's where Senator Lott's lawyer and Senator Nickles' lawyer went in and negotiated it. They would bring me back into the picture when it came to, "Okay, this is what we think the Senate will look like, what do you think about the Senate?" It was almost like you had dual roles. You had to continue it as a trial, because of course that's what it was. But yet it was very important for the leader, both for the right thing to do but for the history aspect of it to make sure that the Senate didn't get tainted as to it becoming a carnival, a dog and pony show, a he said-she said. That was very important for Senator Lott to make sure that did not happen.

Scott: There is always that concern, especially in the case of the impeachment of a president, that someone can appear to be—that the whole process can appear to be too political. It sounds like everyone was very conscious of that.

Letchworth: They were trying to. As I said, I think by the time Senator Lott called this closed session it was teetering on becoming too political. It was teetering on people hunkering down and getting back into the old political clothes where I'm a Democrat or I'm a Republican, I need to protect my base. I think he tried to shake that cloth that everybody was so comfortable in putting right back on. That's why I think that one meeting, which if I remember correctly, lasted more than an hour, several hours, there were several speakers.

Scott: We've also heard about the famous meeting with the Democrats and Republicans in the Old Senate Chamber. The doors were closed and I think some staff were allowed to come in the meeting. Were you in that meeting?

Letchworth: I was, yes.

Scott: What was the nature of the meeting and why did Senator Lott want to do it that way?

Letchworth: That was again another one of these let's try not to bring politics in on this. We have a higher calling. You need to get rid of your political cloak, whatever it be, Republican or Democrat, or red or blue—I guess we didn't have red and blue so much back then [Scott laughs]—and remember that this is your constitutional duty. He gave a little bit of history. I think I can talk a little bit about that. And then there were obviously a few other senators that gave some history. Senator Byrd gave some history. The leadership in general talked about that they understand that this is a role they have to play. Although, for example, the Democratic leadership, it was obviously their Democratic president but that didn't matter. That needed to go out the window. It was a little bit of that. It was a little bit of frame it so that people understood, don't let your constituents, or you know, your polarized constituency that might be screaming at you "Hang him from the highest tree," or, "Let him off because it was nothing but a private matter." You need to block out that noise. You are now jurors. Senator Lott also explained their role, explained to them ... and I can remember looking around the room at a few senators and this light bulb going off. I'm not going to be able to speak? That was a nuance that hadn't sunk into some people until he went through exactly how he could picture any given day going and reminding them that they typically were not going to be able to stand up on the floor and speak. That became a bit of a surprise to some members.

Scott: How did you get a sense for the history? The Andrew Johnson trial is more than 100 years before, about 130 years before. Where did you go to, where did you send people to get information in order to figure things out?

Letchworth: The sergeant at arms had done a wonderful job in trying to put together a history behind how all of it worked. He had hired a couple of people to do basically a black binder cheat sheet book on what the past history looked like. How did the days start out, as best you can piece them together? In other words, how did the chamber start out? Even went to the ceremonial aspect of the House managers walking into the building, I mean walking into the chamber from the House side. We went over every aspect of it and tried to mirror it as best as possible and taking into consideration

modern conveniences. [unintelligible] all of that kind of thing. I can remember literally days and days and days, several weeks of meetings basically sponsored and basically put on by the sergeant at arms office to make sure that we did understand how all of this was going to play out.

When it finally did start, there was almost a sense of relief. Phew, finally this show is going to start. I don't mean it as far as a show, I mean it more that we wanted the production of it to go well. After the first day, the opening day, and it going basically the way we had talked about it going, there was a real sense of okay, let's get down to business and get the actual trial over, get it started, the necessary stages of it done. There was definitely a lot of preparation for that. There was this huge sense of we don't want to screw this up, we meaning everyone behind the scenes. We want the Senate to look the best that it possibly can. It may be another 100 years but this will be the first one and the only one that people will be able to look back on and say it needs to look like this because that's the way they did the Clinton one.

Scott: Do you recall anyone who had been in the Senate in 1974 talking about the early preparation for what they thought might be a Nixon impeachment trial?

Letchworth: I did talk to a couple people that I knew were there and asked them, how far did they get in thinking or puzzling through it? They didn't get all the way through picturing it on the Senate floor. They could tell me more of what they expected would happen if it went to a committee or if they had to have some kind of policy luncheon, they had outlined a little bit of that. They would have policy or Democratic caucus meetings about it. But I could not find anybody who had ever taken it to the point of what it would look like on the floor.

We were flying blind, literally. We were creating this as we went along with the history behind it trying to make sure that we mirrored exactly everything that needed to happen for a procedural matter, but also trying to bring it into the 20th century and to try to take politics out of it because this was a role they were not familiar with, for the most part, senators are not. You do an impeachment of a judge, but basically the committee takes care of it, you listen for an hour or two, you have a vote, you don't know the person unless they happen to be a judge. You know what I'm saying? This was a level that they had never, ever, ever been to. Or expected to be to. So it was a whole new role for everybody involved.

Scott: Well, too, the idea that you would need to talk to them about trying to leave politics at the door here, this is a different kind of event, must be difficult for

people who live in a political world and who are constantly worried about the politics of particular situations. To be able to leave that at the door has to be incredibly difficult.

Letchworth: I think it is, and I think it was, but I think the Old Senate Chamber meeting helped start that whole thought process and really kicked it off in a wonderful way. Hats off to the leader for thinking of that and putting that together and knowing that it needed to be ratcheted up to a level that there wasn't a single senator that I'm sure when he or she decided to run ever would be in this situation. You're right, all of them are political creatures by nature or they wouldn't be where they are for the most part. So to tell them to take that hat off and put it in a closet for a week, 10 days, and don't even think about politics.

You can think about a completely clearheaded view of how you judge another American in a role that you've never been in, what is a daunting task but one that they needed to really wrap their arms around. The meeting that the leader called was a great way to get them to think about that. I was amazed at how little griping, how little the normal politics of the world came in. "Well he got to speak, how come I didn't?" First of all, you didn't have any of that. [Scott laughs] But even separate from that, they just created it—they took the job with such, they took on their responsibility of the job which with a real sincere sense of I've got to do this for history but I've got to do this. Many of them read that black binder I told you about that talked about the history, many of them had that type of black binder that we gave them so that they knew what they were up against or what was expected of them.

Scott: How do you think the whole thing turned out? And I don't just mean the acquittal but in the sense of you working behind the scenes to make sure that this production goes along smoothly? Do you feel like things went the way you hoped they would?

Letchworth: I do. I was very pleased. I think the leader was very pleased, literally, with the production of it. To me Senator Lott looked like he was in control at all times. And that was important. The chief justice looked like he was in control when he was supposed to be in control. They didn't step on each other's feet. One didn't lessen the other's role. They worked hand in hand very well in a situation where really the leader technically wasn't supposed to be in the role at all. So I thought it went very, very well. I do know that the leader thought that for the most part it went well.

He was pleased to get it off his shoulders and to move on to other things. It had occupied the leadership's time for such a long time. We had even had meetings before the State of the Union leading up to that, whether to go to the State of the Union, whether to

sit down, do you clap? What was that going to look like and then we're going to turn around and have an impeachment trial? We even had ... it affected even that kind of daily activity leading up to the impeachment trial. It was something you wanted to get done just to get it done, just to get back to the Senate being the Senate. But you also wanted to do it right. There was a real sense of, "Wow, that is done." It could have come out, obviously, a different result for most, for a lot of people on the Republican side of the aisle. But that is what it is. I think for the most part people were pleased that the production of it went off well.

Scott: What do you think about the acquittal? Do you think that was the right thing?

Letchworth: Personally, I was surprised at the final vote. We had puzzled through it being different. There was a surprise or two and one of them was Senator [Arlen] Specter with his creative way of voting. I'll put it like that. That was a bit of a surprise.

Scott: How was it creative?

Letchworth: He quoted Scottish law. It was Scottish law as a way to vote. [Not proven, recorded as not guilty.] It wasn't yea or nay, it was some in between kind of thing that he created just to be different to a certain extent. I can remember when he did it, Senator Lott said "What did he just say?" [Scott laughs] And I had to repeat it to him and we looked at each other like, I don't know what he means. We kind of knew, but we kind of didn't know. It was like, where did that come from? Senator Lott did have a whip count with him, he had a whip card with him where he thought everybody was going to be. Obviously he was as surprised at that Senator Specter's what was it? I can't remember what it was called. As soon as we stop talking I'll remember it. His statement was a bit of a surprise.

Scott: So he was keeping a vote count just as he would for any other piece of legislation?

Letchworth: Yep, he was.

Scott: And some of those votes changed unexpectedly?

Letchworth: That one was very unexpected. There was a period of time where Senator Lott thought that Senator Byrd might be a supporter and obviously learned that he would not. There was a period of time when Senator Byrd was on Senator Lott's whip

count to be a supporter and was not. So it was an ongoing whip count, but yes, he definitely had one. In that respect just like it was a vote cast, a bill passing. I sat next to him during the vote and watched him check off the yeas and nays. It almost came to me what Senator Specter said.

Scott: I'll have to look it up, we can enter it later.

Letchworth: I'll look it up too, you'll find it interesting.

Scott: In the case of a vote count like that, let's just put aside the impeachment, this brings up a question I'd like to ask you about just keeping counts of votes. Would the leader, would Senator Lott ever approach senators after if they surprised him with their vote and ask them why?

Letchworth: I can remember all leaders that I worked for doing that at some point or another. Not in a confrontational kind of way, but sort of like, "Gee, I had you in this category and you ended up in that category. What happened?" A lot of time it was the result of something that happened to the bill towards the end, something good or bad. And most times the conversation was, "I understand, next time let me know. Don't blindside me." They got a little bit of a lecture of, you know, "It's helpful if I know this in advance." Typically, especially if it was a tough one, especially if you lost by one or two. Sure you went to the senator as cordially as you can. They respect everybody's vote. Everybody has the ability to vote their conscience. You understand that it's a learning process. If you understand what flipped them at the last minute, then you'll understand, maybe I can watch out for that to see that it doesn't happen again. It's twofold. One, you as the leader want to make sure you didn't do anything to cause the problem. And if you didn't, learn what the problem was, if it turned out to be a problem for you, to try to make sure it didn't happen again. That is not that unusual. I can remember every leader I worked for doing that and I never remember it being a real confrontation, you know, jumping them and saying, "Hey you just left me in the lurch, why did you—?" I don't remember it being that at all.

Scott: That wouldn't do anybody any good because then you'd have two people angry with one another right?

Letchworth: Hey Kate, I'm going to have to quit at 3:45, is that okay?

Scott: That's okay. I was just thinking that this is probably a good place for us to wind up. I'm going to turn it off.

Letchworth: Okay.