

## On the Senate Floor

October 5, 2010

Interview #1

**Scott:** Welcome, thank you for being here. We're delighted to have you.

**Letchworth:** Thank you, Kate. This is wonderful. I'm excited about it.

**Scott:** Let's start with your childhood. Where did you grow up? You are originally from Virginia?

**Letchworth:** I'm originally from Virginia and spent my summers in southwestern Virginia which is near the tip of Virginia near Tennessee. I did my schooling for the most part in the Northern Virginia area. I am wedged between two brothers. I have a brother 10 months older than me and then myself and then a brother 13 months younger than me. Three kids right away, and I always kind of thought that maybe I was born to be a negotiator because I negotiated in between these two boys. I don't know if that's true or not, you know they talk about the middle child thing, I don't know if that works. Anyway, three kids, grew up in Virginia. My parents were both politically involved. My dad has been a lobbyist for years. He worked on the Hill for years on the House side for a couple of members of Congress. He was AA [administrative assistant] to one member of Congress. My mom actually retired from the Hill. Politics was our dinnertime conversation as you can well imagine. I did all these summer jobs and then when it became time to consider being a summer page, Mom threw it out and I bit. Obviously I bit because I did it.

**Scott:** Who did your parents work for on the Hill?

**Letchworth:** My mom worked for Senator [John] Tower [R-TX]. She worked for Senator [James] Pearson of Kansas [R]. My dad worked for [Otis] Hal Holmes [R] from Washington State. No one necessarily from Virginia. They knew Senator Byrd, Harry Byrd [D-VA]. But they didn't necessarily work for Virginia members of Congress, but other members of Congress.

**Scott:** Were they commuting up here then or had you relocated to some place closer to Washington?

**Letchworth:** They were in Northern Virginia at that point. They met and married in the Northern Virginia area. Both had entry level jobs bopping around on the Hill. They kept them through having children.

**Scott:** Your mom—was she working full time on the Hill?

**Letchworth:** She was. She actually ended up as a senior staffer of the Senate Republican Policy Committee and created what was known as the legislative notice for the policy committee. It took the committee reports of bills and broke them down in King's English. It was a little bit of a cheat sheet, if you want to call it that, and she passed those out to the senators before they voted on stuff. She kind of created that whole idea and bounced it off Senator Tower when he was chairman of the policy committee. He liked it and it became—Of course they have all that now in the electronic version but that was kind of the beginning of it.

**Scott:** When did she work for him?

**Letchworth:** I'm trying to backtrack a little bit, late '70s into the '80s because he left in 1984.

**Scott:** So your mom was working here when you became a Senate page?

**Letchworth:** Yes, we actually commuted when we could in the summertime together. She basically had very similar hours to the floor hours and of course, as a page, you're stuck with the Senate floor hours. That worked out pretty well. When she could go home early she just sat in the office and probably did some work waiting for me. We'd chat on the way home—was that a neat debate or not neat debate. She taught me a lot about procedure because as a kid it's all sort of Greek to you, as you can imagine. On our trips back home we would talk about what went on. They probably gave me more intrigue because I was able to bounce off, "What did that mean when this happened today, Mom?" We could talk about that and it kept my interest up.

**Scott:** Were your parents involved in local politics as well? Or they were politically active as staff for members here?

**Letchworth:** They have been both. Both politically active locally—my dad ran for the state senate in Virginia. I was literally an infant, so you want to say the early '60s. He lost. He tried his bid for local and they have always been politically involved, both locally and at the federal level.

**Scott:** And Republicans.

**Letchworth:** Yes.

**Scott:** So in 1975 you come to the Senate as a page. You were a junior in high school.

**Letchworth:** That was the end of my sophomore year. It was going to be a summer job. It was the summer job that never quit. As I said, I took to it right away. It was an exciting time. The Wyman-Durkin debates<sup>1</sup> were going on and they were debating whether to seat one senator versus the other. That taught me a little about the political process. It was Politics 101. For a 15-year-old kid it was like learning in a class. So I didn't, thank goodness, end up being a page during a boring debate like an ag[riculture] bill or something that would have probably bored me to tears so I would have said, "Mom, I don't want to do this. I'd rather babysit all summer." It turned out not to be that. Who knows why, but that's the way it was.

This doesn't occur anymore and it may not be something you are familiar with, but back then before the e-mail, before the Blackberry, before electronic anything, the leadership had their own pages. If you think about it, they had two offices. They had a Capitol office and they had an office in Russell or Dirksen. To get hard copies back and forth somebody had to do it—if we think about it, it sounds so antiquated—so they got assigned the leader's page. For whatever reason, after having been there a couple of weeks, they assigned me as the leader's page. Senator Hugh Scott [R-PA] was the leader at the time. I don't know whether he ran things back and forth to the two offices more often than not. It seemed like I ran all the time. In the process, you got to know both offices. I got to know the Capitol leader's office really, really well. It got to the point where if it was a sort of boring debate, I'd go sit down there with them, the adults, in the Capitol office and ask, "What else can I do for you?" They would say, "Answer these letters." I learned the legislative correspondent's role. After my page-ship was over I didn't want to go home, so to speak. I liked this whole idea. They created a role, a little bit like a legislative correspondent, a glorified intern. The pay was the same as a page. But now I was reporting to them.

**Scott:** To Senator Scott's office?

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<sup>1</sup> The 1974 Senate election contest between John Durkin and Louis Wyman resulted in a winning margin for Wyman of just 355 votes. Durkin asked for a recount, which resulted in Durkin being declared a winner by just 10 votes. A second recount by the state ballot commission declared Wyman the winner by just 2 votes. Durkin then petitioned the Senate to review the case, and on July 30, 1975, the Senate voted to declare the seat vacant as of August 8, 1975; New Hampshire then called a special election to fill the seat on September 16, 1975. Durkin won by a 27,000-vote margin.

**Letchworth:** To Senator Scott's office, right. He became a wonderful sort of mentor as far as a grandfather. He would stay late at times and tell me about the Senate of old. He really was a charming man. He loved China and at that point in his career had made several unprecedented trips to China before it was cool to go to China. He would tell me about the promise that he could see that China could be eventually. He was an interesting man and I always appreciated the fact that he even knew who I was. Not that members of Congress ignore their junior staff. But you know the whole bit about them not having the time. And he seemed to take the time. I appreciated that.

**Scott:** Do you think that was because he was of another generation? Or was that more of his personality?

**Letchworth:** Probably both. He did have a daughter. It could have been that I was a daughter-like person to him. I met his daughter a couple of times. It could have been something like that. I think it was generational. I just think that he liked to pontificate. Do you know what I mean? Sit around the fire and talk about something.

**Scott:** I want to back up a little bit—how did you get into the page school? Is this something that you applied for? Did you come and interview? How did it work?

**Letchworth:** In my case, my mom asked the secretary for the minority, the job I eventually got, she asked the then sitting secretary for the minority, who was Bill Hildenbrand, if there was a spot in the summer. He created a spot. That's basically how it happened. Not anything really complicated. There wasn't an application process like the school year-round pages. Now you remember back then you could go to page school all four years: freshman, sophomore, junior, senior. You could do all four years. Because I was parachuting in as a summer page, I kind of skipped all of that. He was fine with that.

**Scott:** Once the summer internship was over and they created this other role for you, this ad hoc role, what about school? Did you then attend the page school?

**Letchworth:** I did attend the page school. I finished out those years. I did my junior and senior years in the D.C. public school system. Back then it was a D.C. public school. I do really take pride in the fact that one of the first things I did as secretary for the majority was to take it out of the D.C. school system and make it an accredited private school. There are so many smart kids—I was not one—but so many of these kids are the crème de la crème of little town U.S.A. and the D.C. school system just could not keep up. I would hear horror stories from my friends who would go back to wherever they were from and they can't pick up the geography, they can't pick up the math, they

can't—because the D.C. school system wasn't equipped to do curriculum on the fly, which is what you really need with pages.

**Scott:** How did you work out a schedule within the page school?

**Letchworth:** Basically, you do 6 to 9:30 and then walk across the street, come to work, at 9:45. Back then the Senate didn't convene as early so that usually worked out pretty well that you could have the straight almost four hours. If you think about it, traditional school is four hours. If you have 45 minutes for lunch and P.E., you are actually in school for about four straight hours. This was four straight hours. You went from class to class to class until you were done at 9:45, ten o'clock and then you walked across and started your work day.

**Scott:** What time did your work day end back then?

**Letchworth:** It was always when the Senate went out. They had some long hours. I could probably pull up the digest and figure out which was longer. It probably pretty much works out to be the same. They were long hours. Of course you would do your homework in the lobby, pages still do that. The curriculum and the accredited private school aspect of the page school [today] to me serves those young people so much better than the D.C. school system ever could. They just couldn't adapt. They were not equipped to adapt. It's like trying to have a charter school within the D.C. public school system. Back in the '70s and '80s, that was probably bizarre sounding to anybody.

**Scott:** Where was the page school then?

**Letchworth:** It was in the Library of Congress. It was in what is officially the stacks of the Library of Congress. You took this weird little elevator all the way to the top and they had cleared out rooms, storage rooms, for us. So we did have a math room and an English room and whatnot. But you sort of meandered through these weird little hallways to get to these rooms. It was a real makeshift school. But it did work, it did work as far as serving as the function of the school. You took this weird elevator back down to the first floor and everybody walked across the street to either the House or the Senate. That was back when the House and Senate went to school at the same time. If they convened at different times, which many times they did, that got a little weird. That got a little cumbersome because the House pages would get 15 minutes of math and the Senate pages would have 35 minutes of math. That caused more problems. The writing was on the wall that something needed to be done and it seemed like the natural thing to do.

**Scott:** Were you the only female page in the school at that time?

**Letchworth:** No, there were a handful. It wasn't common, but there were a handful. I can remember being the only female page for the Senate Republicans for a while. There were still things that the females couldn't do.

**Scott:** Like what?

**Letchworth:** The marble room, which is sort of the relaxing lobby behind the lobby. We weren't allowed to go in there and check because members could be back there. This was actually the case when I became the first female cloakroom assistant. There was a big debate within the leadership, not a big debate but a little bit of debate, should she be allowed in there all the time? Back then, this is going to sound weird, especially the older senators, if they wanted to lay down and take a nap they would take their pants off. They wanted that nice crease. So they might take their pants off and fold them over the back of the chair and sit there and read the paper. Of course, that would have been really awkward for a 15-year-old girl to walk in on. Now of course that ended very quickly. But at the beginning, there were a few places that they didn't want females to go. I simply would ask a boy page, "Can you go check the marble room, I'm looking for Senator Goldwater." You ask a Democrat or a Republican, anybody would help you. A guy would walk through there and say, "He's not in there." "Thanks a lot, bye." It was a tag team system for the few places they didn't want you to go.

**Scott:** When you worked in Senator Scott's office, you quickly moved into this legislative correspondent role.

**Letchworth:** Right, there were dead times obviously. You know, as with any office, especially back then when they did a lot of the legislative correspondence, they would give me what I'm sure were the simple issues. Teach me how to research it, where the senator was on the issue. I would craft two or three boiler plate letters to answer to these folks: "Thank you very much for your recent letter to the senator on the agriculture issue. Please be assured he will keep your interests in mind."

**Scott:** They weren't complicated policy issues.

**Letchworth:** It was literally the lowest intern/legislative correspondent position. And then as the Senate stayed in late at night, the leader's offices were more, back then, places for members of the Senate to go and have a drink. To sit around and talk about, "How long are we going to be in session?" "Boy, wasn't that a horrible session?" They would kind of unwind. I started serving drinks and passing out the peanuts. The leader's

office back then became a little bit of an open bar. I assisted in that way and cleaned up afterwards. You can just imagine whatever an intern would do. I would help him pack up and archive his office when he retired. From there I moved into the cloakroom.

**Scott:** When you were in Senator Scott's office, who did you work with frequently? Who did you often talk to when you had a question about how to handle something?

**Letchworth:** Margie, who ended up marrying Senator Pearson, was the office manager and she might have had the role of the AA also. She would give me the marching orders if I ended up, on any one particular day, without much to do. Otherwise there was a little bit of a schedule to what I did. I did the page routine, made sure the other office was okay with whatever needed to go back and forth. They did have a mid-day run, a morning run. Of course you got into situations when you needed stuff quicker. I know it's hard to realize—why didn't you just e-mail it to them?—there wasn't that. There was a little bit of that to the schedule. I did have a little bit of a desk. It was more like a table. The legislative folks would put some letters on my desk to try to answer and I'd find out where the bill was, whatever the question was. There was always something to do. By four and five o'clock when the normal day was slowing down, a couple of members would come in and say, "Is the bar open?" I'd go open the bar for them and they certainly didn't want to talk to me! But you gave them a drink and put the peanuts out and before you knew it a couple of members of Congress were back there. I'd just ease out and poke my head in every so often and make sure everybody was okay. Keep that running.

**Scott:** Who were some of the senators that you remember coming by?

**Letchworth:** I do remember Senator Pearson. Of course we now know why he came by so often! Senator [Robert] Stafford [R] of Vermont, I remember him coming in. I can't remember others off the top of my head.

**Scott:** These open bar sessions, were they discussing policy? Were they telling personal stories?

**Letchworth:** No. I remember a lot of it being analysis of the day and decompressing or strategizing on maybe what the next day would be. But they weren't so partisan that if a Democrat were to walk in, the drink would [not] have been had for him. It wasn't that kind of thing. It wasn't like a caucus, it really wasn't. You didn't get the impression that there was a lot of partisanship spoken. It was like decompressing for the day.

**Scott:** Like going to a bar.

**Letchworth:** Right, and, "How was your day? Mine was horrible." And, "What's your weekend going to be like?"

**Scott:** What were some of the defining qualities of Hugh Scott's leadership? Did you get a sense for that? I know you were working at a very entry-level position but did you get a sense for what kind of leader he was?

**Letchworth:** I didn't basically because I got there so late and was kind of learning everything else. So I don't want to comment on that because I think I would be just sort of guessing.

**Scott:** He was very accessible to you.

**Letchworth:** Yes, and I don't know if that was typical—I just don't know. By the time I showed up, yes, he was very accessible. It's almost like he wanted to teach. He wanted to pass something along.

**Scott:** Is it because he's leaving? Or because that's the kind of person he is?

**Letchworth:** I don't know.

**Scott:** When he left, you transitioned into the cloakroom?

**Letchworth:** Yes.

**Scott:** How did you get into that position?

**Letchworth:** The question was asked to the then secretary for the minority, Bill Hildenbrand. Of course, he was a Hugh Scott staffer at one point. He saw me all the time. I, of course, was not a Hugh Scott staffer. I probably had never been to Pennsylvania at that point in my life. It was just one of those relationships you build. I guess he thought it being a little natural for me to move from that spot over into the cloakroom. But there was some debate—should a girl be in there? Is the cussing going to offend her? Not that I even remember cussing, honestly I don't. But those type conversations came up. And believe me they did not spend a lot of time figuring out whether this girl should be in the cloakroom or not, I can tell you. But concerns were raised. They basically said the time



has come. What foul language she might hear is probably not as bad as she would hear on the school yards at that point. You have to remember this is late '70s, early '80s.

**Scott:** The world was changing.

**Letchworth:** The world was changing. Actually it was like, "Let's give it a try." I can't say that I felt like there was a trial. But I was definitely told, let's give this a try and if it doesn't work we'll see what else might work, whether he would create something in the office. It went off without a hitch.

**Scott:** At that point Bill Hildenbrand is your supervisor.

**Letchworth:** Right.

**Scott:** What kind of duties did you do as a cloakroom assistant? What was a typical day like?

**Letchworth:** A typical day back then was trying to figure out the attendance, which was done at 9:15 by the hotline system. Personal secretaries called in and said that the member of Congress would be there or not be there for the day. By 9:30 or 10:00 you could give to the party secretary, who at that time was Bill, and he could go into the 9:45 or the 10:00 staff meeting with the majority or minority leader with an attendance card saying if you want to have votes today your best time to have them is between whatever the scenario was. He would then disseminate what the schedule was going to be like. Basically legislative assistants [LAs] came in the office and called the cloakroom for that day and said, "What's the day going to be like?" That directed their day. As the day changed, as the bills on the floor changed, as the action on the floor changed, we knew it first. We became the hub to letting everybody else know. Of course, now you have the Internet and all of that, but back then you just had the squawk boxes and if you didn't listen to the squawk box all the time you had to talk to somebody that sat on the floor or you called the cloakroom. So the cloakroom had to stay on top of what was going on.

**Scott:** You must have been in constant contact with Bill Hildenbrand.

**Letchworth:** Exactly.

**Scott:** He was updating you so you could tell the LAs when they called what was going on.

**Letchworth:** Back then you almost had one of the cloakroom assistants' prime responsibility was to listen as close as you could to the squawk box. You told everybody else, "Hey it looks like we're going to be moving to senator-so-and-so's amendment next." They would know that. Also another responsibility which helped define the next role I had which was the legislative scheduling office is, under the minority leader or majority leader, whichever role you want to talk about, was a position and I don't remember what Oliver Dompierre's position was called, but he handled the mark calendar for the leader. As his career got toward the end, he liked to go to lunch. He liked to stay at lunch. He would hand me the mark calendar maybe as early as 11:30 and he might come back at 2:00, sometimes he didn't come back. He told me that if anybody called and wanted to put a hold on a bill or take a hold off a bill, mark it down here on the calendar. That became my added responsibility because I was a girl? Because I wrote neater? There's no magic to it. It wasn't that I had this brilliant look on my face. I don't know why he handed it to me. I can't tell you why that happened. But I became the keeper of the mark calendar.

So if Senator Baker at the time, or Bill Hildenbrand at the time, they wanted to shift gears to another bill, it got the point they would come to me and say, "Elizabeth, go look at calendar number five and tell me how much problem do you think it would be if we moved to that?" By then I had sort of garnered all the knowledge because I was taking the phone calls and I could say, "Oh boy, you could probably get that done in no time." Again, accident, who knows, but that helped create what then became in 1980, when Senator Baker became the majority leader, when he created the legislative scheduling office, that took that mark calendar aspect and moved it to S-123 in addition to the presiding officer's. That's why that whole office was created. The leader seemed to think, and it made sense, you don't want to have all of that in the hub of the cloakroom. First of all, members of Congress might be leery of going into the cloakroom if they were going to be nabbed to sit in the chair. The cloakroom's become a little power hub for leaders. If they are well attended and people sit in there a lot you can buttonhole people, twist the arms a little bit. If people are afraid to come in there or they don't want to come in there—He rightfully thought, let's move some of this out of there so that the cloakroom remains sort of a relaxing place to go and a place to strategize. So it made sense when he created the legislative scheduling office to move the mark calendar down there.

**Scott:** You just followed it, really.

**Letchworth:** Basically.

**Scott:** It's a remarkable amount of responsibility that they had given you. You are all of 18 or 19 years old at this point.

**Letchworth:** I think I was 17 at the time. Again, it could have started out because I had neat handwriting. I have no idea. But I must have remembered it well. When they barked questions at me I must have been able to answer crisply and with some assurance. I guess I didn't lead them astray or they would have taken it away from me. Dompierre retired and they never recreated that spot. That spot was created when we created the legislative scheduling office.

**Scott:** How many other assistants were in the cloakroom?

**Letchworth:** At one point it was five, and I was the fifth, the fifth wheel. Typically, though, it was four.

**Scott:** Is that the minimum amount you need to handle all the information?

**Letchworth:** Typically about how many you have, really for no other reason than the space you have. You are elbow to elbow anyway. It's a bank of phones. It's almost like operators sitting shoulder to shoulder. Typically it was four, sometimes I was the fifth. More than likely was the fourth. And usually the leader had one from his state. Maybe the whip had one, a lot of times they were done sort of in a patronage type of way. Or it was somebody that worked in their office and they caught on to how the legislative flow worked and they would be good in the cloakroom because they could spit back out what was going on. It's before the Internet. If you were a legislative guy or gal sitting in the office, if you weren't glued to the squawk box, there was nowhere else to check in the middle of the day other than the cloakrooms.

**Scott:** We've had a lot of people mention in their oral history interviews that before the days of television you really had to learn the senator's voices so you could know exactly who was on and who was off.

**Letchworth:** That's true. I can recognize them now. I can have the TV on and be in the kitchen and know that's senator so and so, without having to see them. I guess that was training. You definitely had to learn them.

**Scott:** You had a close seat to one of the best shows in town. Here they come into the cloakroom to relax and talk. Did you interact with them much?

**Letchworth:** Yes, you do and that is really a special role. They are even more themselves than in the office because they aren't surrounded by the staff. It's them. And they may sit there waiting to offer an amendment, having finished reading the paper,

having made a few phone calls, and sit down and say, "What's your life like? How's it been?" You learn that their daughter is having problems or their son is a great baseball player. You really get to know them because there are no staff around them. It's just one-on-one with you and the senator. If you do get this rapport with them they want to tell you what their schedule is going to be like. "If you have any influence to make a hole in the schedule from 3 to 4 so I can slip out and see my son play his t-ball game..." They'll be willing to tell you that, thinking that you may be able to influence the schedule a little bit. A lot of times the cloakroom assistants can because schedules change during the day. A good leader will want to double-check the cloakroom by saying, "Is it okay if we scheduled a vote at blah, blah, blah," and of course the party secretary will double check. "Has anybody heard of anybody leaving the Hill that isn't on the attendance card?" "Oh yes, so and so is going to go Christmas shopping."

**Scott:** You would get that kind of detail about someone's day?

**Letchworth:** Sure. Absolutely. They, the member of Congress, doesn't want to miss the vote and be responsible for the leadership having a failed vote. They still do feel the responsibility of letting the cloakroom know when they are going to be off campus for any amount of time.

**Scott:** Did you interact with your counterparts on the Democratic side?

**Letchworth:** You don't really. You do off hours, just commiserating on what your day was like, but you know trade secrets. You don't want to trade those trade secrets. And you obviously don't want to trade attendance records and what not. You could typically talk about who's been a brat today, which senator was a brat in the cloakroom or whatever. There were brats on both sides, you can imagine. But you typically didn't tell the inside scoop.

**Scott:** Who were your favorite senators that you talked to?

**Letchworth:** Ones that warmed up to me in my early years: Senator [Jesse] Helms [R-NC] was wonderful. He loved to take an interest in the pages. Senator [Wendell] Ford [D] of Kentucky, I guess because of his role as the whip, was on the floor a lot. It wouldn't be at all unusual for one or both of them to just grab a couple of pages, take them around to the lobby and just kind of tell them about what life was life in Kentucky. Senator [Strom] Thurmond [D/R-SC] had ice cream with the pages.

**Scott:** Regularly?

**Letchworth:** Pretty regularly. He would always ask permission. He would come to the party secretary or the assistant secretary and say, "Can I take five?" And they'd say, "Boy, I wish you wouldn't." Or, "Sure you can." He would take them down to the dining room and have ice cream with them and talk with them. There were a fair amount of members of Congress that did that. I don't think they do that so typically now. It's a time restraint thing, it's not that they are not any more personable than they were back then. It's a time restraint thing, I think.

**Scott:** What would you talk about with Senator Thurmond? Did he talk politics and policy? Or would they be talks about personal stories?

**Letchworth:** More personal things with Senator Thurmond. He liked to talk about his children. He had page-aged children. Actually all four of his children were pages, I'm not sure of that. I know two or three of his four children were pages. He would tell them what his kids were up to and find out what we were up to. Where were we from? You know, go around the table. "Where are you from? What were you doing in high school before you got this job? What do you look forward to going back to?" He really took an interest in your life.

**Scott:** How much time did you have to talk to the other pages or the other assistants? Do you get to know one another fairly well?

**Letchworth:** You do. Back then the pages did not have the page dorm like they do now. They stayed in what was called Thompson Markwood Hall or the Y. Some of them stayed in rooming houses that various people around Capitol Hill pledged a room to. It was worked out through the senator's office. But it was basically someone's basement apartment. The pages were more on their own. As a result of that my parents didn't want me having a lot to do with a lot of the pages after hours because they could get very wild. Here was a 16 year old in Washington, D.C.! My time with them was literally at work. I went home with my mom typically. I can remember being allowed maybe two or three times to come back into Washington Friday night to go over to someone's house. It was typically a teenage party and my mom knew it and I'm sure she sweated BBs the whole time. I did not have a lot of interaction off hours. But during the work hours—all the time. You talked a lot about school, your assignments, how do you get through the assignment. Talked about the Senate work, how would you divide this up, especially if there was a big run to all senators' offices.

As antiquated as it is, the Senate cloakroom used to be open on Saturday, from 9 to 12. You know what we did? We came in and delivered the whip notice. Doesn't that sound so antiquated? A cloakroom assistant had to come in, had to open up the

cloakroom and the pages came in, sorted this three- or four-page notice of what the next week was going to be, stapled it, folded it, stuffed it in envelopes. We divided up the buildings: you get the Russell, you get the Dirksen, you get the Hart. Run around and if we got done early we could leave early. If not, we had to wait until everybody got done. It was 9 to 12 every Saturday. There was no e-mail blast. Monday morning, or if a serious staffer came in over the weekend, we slipped it underneath the door, was the schedule for the next week as best you could tell it. There you go.

**Scott:** It's a six-day week.

**Letchworth:** Again, that probably sounds so antiquated but that was the best way that you could do it.

**Scott:** You mentioned briefly the hotlining process. We often get calls in our office about the origins of hotlining. Can you describe that a little bit? How it worked?

**Letchworth:** The hotline system is a lot better than it was at the beginning. Basically, there was one button on somebody's phone in every senator's office and he or she designated where it was going to be. Maybe you could have more than one button. But it was the designated button and somebody in each office was designated to answer that at all times. It was basically what we would call now an e-mail blast. But it was a verbal blast. There was a little saying, I don't know if it's still in the recording booth, that said, "A word spoken is an arrow let fly." I would sit there and read that right before. You didn't get do-overs. You picked up the phone, you dialed a series of four or five numbers and whatever you said went out. You couldn't say, "Whoops." It's not like a voice mail—"If you are pleased with this voice mail press one." It's not like that, or it wasn't like that. So you typically put out the attendance or roll-call vote, or the leadership would like all members to meet in blah, blah, blah, for whatever the scenario was. Pretty antiquated nowadays.

**Scott:** But at the time it was pretty advanced.

**Letchworth:** It was state of the art.

**Scott:** The entire time that you worked in the cloakroom, you were using the hotline. It predated your arrival?

**Letchworth:** Yes, the hotline system was still there pre-beepers. The next stage was then a beeper that beeped. You entered the cell phones and all that.

**Scott:** That would have been nerve-wracking. I'm terrible leaving the voice mail message, I always have to go back and re-do it. Did you have any slip-ups? Any moments that you thought, "Oh I wished that wouldn't have happened?"

**Letchworth:** I remember Senator Hatfield talking to me on the floor. He didn't like the way I said "Oregon." I apparently had said it for whatever reason: "We are voting on Senator Packwood's amendment from Oregon," and he corrected me. Other than that I really don't remember.

**Scott:** I'm from Seattle originally and since I've moved out here I've realized that a lot of people out here don't know how to say Oregon.

**Letchworth:** Exactly. I apparently butchered it. He wasn't mean. But he wanted to set the record straight that it is not OR-I-GON, it is Oregon.

**Scott:** Did you ever have a moment or moments when you first started, either as a page or in the cloakroom, when you got nervous working with the senators? Were you ever concerned that you weren't behaving in the right way or that you weren't doing something right?

**Letchworth:** No. Not that I was the perfect page. I don't mean that. It's more intimidating to think about it than to actually do it. They are men and women just like you and I. They are somebody's mom and dad and they are just human beings. And even ones that appeared to be gruff were not at all. I think I had a unique position because they weren't surrounded by the staff and the press. There was no image to keep up. They are in the cloakroom, this little hub where it's just them. And a lot of times they would sit in there for a long period of time and get bored.

I can remember that Senator Goldwater taught me how to sew. Not that I didn't know how to sew but he must have assumed that I didn't. He did teach me an extra way to do buttons and I became the sew lady. When senators had buttons they needed—I kept a sewing kit in my desk to sew buttons on. Democrats and Republicans came in. I have a picture of me sewing Senator's Quayle's button on at [Richard] Nixon's funeral. We got off the plane and his button came off and I don't know why I had my little sewing kit. There's a picture, I actually do have that.

**Scott:** Old habits die hard.

**Letchworth:** I guess. I was looking at that the other day. My gosh, I was sewing his button on. I remember where it was and I could remember what I had on.

**Scott:** That's really interesting. What was Senator Howard Baker like?

**Letchworth:** He is and was an absolute sweetheart. A wonderful leader to work with. Tried to cross the aisle as best he could, tried to be the compromiser, but really could crack the whip when he needed to. Senator [Ted] Stevens [R-AK] was an absolute delight. I can remember when Senator Stevens' first wife died in the plane crash and I can remember specifically the morning it happened and getting word and I was working that day, we were in recess. I was working in the cloakroom that day and got word as to what happened and made the executive decision that I'm going to transfer the phones down to his office. We all went down to the whip office and manned the phone. Back then that was the only way to learn what had happened. His office, whip office, the phones were ringing off the hook: What had happened? Who had died? You didn't have the e-mail and you didn't have the BlackBerry.

**Scott:** You didn't have the Internet. You couldn't check all the news.

**Letchworth:** Right. I remember getting word from his office in Alaska as to what happened and I can remember thinking, well, there's no point in us sitting in the cloakroom. Let's just send all the phones down there. So we manned his office for a couple days to try to help them out with that.

**Scott:** Why would you have been in during recess? What kind of tasks would you have been doing?

**Letchworth:** The pages still run, they still have the duties. You do a skeleton crew, the cloakrooms are still opened during the recess. They are a skeleton crew, but you still have questions. What are we going to do when we get back? When's the first vote? The pages still have runs to do. Cloakrooms are 10 to 4. That was one of those scenarios. We were in with a skeleton crew and I just thought, we're not doing any good sitting down the hall from where the phones are literally burning up and there was no one coming in to answer them because they obviously had other things to do.

**Scott:** You did work with Senator Stevens—

**Letchworth:** Absolutely. Both Senator Baker and Senator Stevens at the end of grueling sessions would have the cloakroom staff and the floor staff come down to the office for a celebratory end-of-session drink or soda, whatever. You decompressed. You did the high fives and the atta boys, or said, boy we should have done this better or we could have done this better. They both were very good about that even if it was midnight



or one in the morning, either one of them or both of them would say let's have a little celebration in my office. Everybody had different roles, whether you are talking about the floor staff or the cloakroom staff. But we could all kind of decompress and say, boy that was tough. Or, boy that was fun. That helped bring the whole thing back into perspective. It was nice.

**Scott:** A team building exercise.

**Letchworth:** It really was and I don't know if that is done so much anymore. I know even 2000-2001 we did that a little bit. That's a function of the time. As soon as the Senate's out, people want to get home. So I don't know if that's done so much anymore.

**Scott:** Senator Stevens was known as an irascible character around here. But it doesn't sound like that's the experience you had with him.

**Letchworth:** No, he really was not. He was a teddy bear instead of a bear. He couldn't have been nicer to me. He really was delightful to the floor staff and to the cloakroom staff. We loved him.

**Scott:** You followed the mark calendar and established a new office?

**Letchworth:** Senator Baker, in 1980, when it was obvious that he was going to be the majority leader, now all of a sudden the Republicans were going to have to schedule the presiding officers. I remember being in meetings with Senator Baker talking about, "I don't think I want that in the cloakroom," again for the reason we talked about a few minutes ago. "I want the cloakroom to be open. If they think they are going to get nabbed or ambushed to do a job, they won't come in. I need that power hub." So he found one of the Capitol offices, one of the very precious Capitol offices—S-123 was a great location. It belonged to Senator Javits. He obviously didn't run again, he was defeated actually, and it was his Capitol office and it took us a while to get him out. He took a while to move out.

**Scott:** Longer than the 60 days?

**Letchworth:** A lot longer. We were in the hallway and in part of the office and then other part of the office. As he would move his boxes we would move them closer to the door. We put an extra chair—there was a little bit of respectful tug-of-war there. It went into March or April. He wanted to keep coming in. Bless his heart. So we had a little respectful tug-of-war until he finally vacated. We made it what it was supposed to be, the vision of Senator Baker, where we would schedule presiding officers, where the

personal secretaries would call and schedule their bosses. If you had a hold on a bill or wanted to be notified on a bill, you called that office. It made it all separate so the cloakroom could remain a gathering place. A strategic place. But you didn't get beat up on information and you didn't get beat up for other tasks, so to speak.

**Scott:** This office becomes a clearing house for scheduling?

**Letchworth:** It did. That's where the scripts for the leader were when he would want to call up bills and needed to follow a script, sending amendments to the desk, that's where the scripts were all typed. That office became, well we named it legislative scheduling but that's where it all was put together. Even the scripts for the day, when the leader would come in, that wasn't done through the leader's office. That wasn't done through the cloakroom. That was done downstairs in S-123. When he came in and opened the Senate, a script was handed to him so he would know that today we are going to debate whatever. It was the cheat sheet. We created the cheat sheet for him.

**Scott:** This is his invention.

**Letchworth:** He created it. In some ways it mirrored the Democratic Policy Committee. The Republicans organized differently and always have organized differently. Republicans specifically did not want the Republican leader being head of the Policy Committee. We have a separate head. You know the Democrats, it's sort of the same. This was his way of creating that. He was the head of the legislative scheduling office. Technically it was under the payroll of the party secretary.

**Scott:** At this point, let's say after 1980, when the Republicans gained majority, you are out of school, you have graduated. Did you think of attending college?

**Letchworth:** I tried college. College was not for me. I tried doing community college, I took classes along the side and at night. Nothing grabbed me. The Senate kept tugging at me and tugging at me. As the majority became bigger and bigger and the responsibility became bigger and bigger, and scheduling of bills became bigger and bigger, that's the first thing that went.

**Scott:** It strikes me that even if you had gone into a university environment and perhaps decided to major in political science or something, you'd be learning about things that you were literally doing.

**Letchworth:** I like to say my college was on the Senate floor. That's where my university was. I'm very blessed to have had that opportunity. Especially when you start as early as a page, you literally know every aspect to how a law is made.

I can remember being a page when the blue papers were missing. The blue papers are the official papers between the House and the Senate. I can remember that that actually stalled the Senate from taking up a piece of legislation because they had to pass a resolution to recreate them and the resolution to recreate the blue papers had a temporary glitch. Interestingly enough, that time frame was enough to get some problems worked out. It was like having a hold on the bill. The end of this story is that by the time the person that was ready to take up the bill was ready, the blue papers miraculously showed up in inside mail (if you remember what inside mail was like) the day before all of this was going to happen. After that the clerks instituted that you had to sign in and out if you were to take the blue papers. A staff director could typically borrow the blue papers, especially if he or she wanted to construct what the conference would look like or what the committee needed to work on. But if they disappeared, literally the Senate was out a law. And this particular set of blue papers disappeared. I remember learning that interesting fact. Boy, you could do a lot of damage if you just threw away a bunch of official papers. How Neanderthal that sounds, but it is what it is. The Senate had to create a resolution and ask the House to recreate them, pass them in both the House and the Senate and the House had to recreate the official papers.

**Scott:** This took days.

**Letchworth:** It took days. Literally by the time they were ready, the compromise was hammered out. The blue papers ended up coming back to their original clerk's office, the secretary of the Senate's office, in inside mail.

**Scott:** When was this?

**Letchworth:** I want to say 1978-1979.

**Scott:** I'd like to ask you about the watershed election of 1980. The Democrats had been the majority party for more than two decades. In 1981 people think of it as a fresh start. Did you have a sense for that in the position you were in? What was the atmosphere like?

**Letchworth:** It absolutely was a fresh start. Even in my little world, it was a fresh start because here I was going to be able to put together this new office, this new concept. I bought into the whole concept. It was all fresh. The idea that Republicans

could sit in the chair! You had very senior members of the Republican Party wanting to sit in the chair because they had never done it. They had never done it! Now it's a burden. But back then that was such a unique experience. They all wanted to do it. Even setting up the staff to start the presiding officers, that was all easy and we set up a seniority system even for that. The more senior ones only had to do one hour a week. And then the next class had to do—I don't remember what it was. You can imagine. We had a huge freshman class so we had a huge pot of people to pick on. We sort of figured out, let's make them have four or five hours a week. All of that was fresh. All of these members who had been in the minority party for so long now were going to be chairmen. They get to set the agenda. They get to call the witnesses. The excitement was unbelievable.

**Scott:** Do you remember where you were on election night?

**Letchworth:** I do. I was in Senator Baker's office and the party secretary's office. There was a sort of combined party between the two. Of course, it went into the wee, wee hours of the morning. The next morning Senator Byrd wanted to come in and congratulate Senator Baker. I can remember being one of the first people in the office and trying to figure out, going to the staff of Senator Baker's office, when do you want this meeting to occur? Presumably we're going to be taking photographs of the two shaking hands. There was a little bit of coordination. What time can you be in? Logistics. The passing of the mantle that was going to be the first ceremonial passing. They didn't literally pass anything to each other, but it was about the "congratulations" and "I look forward to working with you in the next Congress."

**Scott:** That happened right away, this didn't wait until January.

**Letchworth:** No, it did not. If it wasn't the next morning, it was the following next morning. Senator Byrd called and said, "I want to come and do a congratulatory and sit down with Senator Baker in the front office in front of the fireplace, that whole setting and do the congratulatory." "Anything I can do to help you" kind of conversations took place. You definitely felt it right away.

**Scott:** Did your workload skyrocket right away? Was there a lot of concern about getting things scheduled and get things moving?

**Letchworth:** Yes, it did. When you think about it, it's easier to be in the minority. All you do is lob hand grenades. You just say no to whatever. It's easier to find one person to say no. But think about it, when all you've had to do for years and years is to find the Jessie Helms of the world, or I'm going to say Senator DeMint because he's the most recent example, find a Senator DeMint to say, "Over my dead body." Okay, you've

made one phone call, you've checked that box, now you can say, "We can object." But in the majority you've got to make sure the chairman can be there, can the bill manager be there, can the first two amendment offerers be there? Does this work for the leader's office? You've got to check, let's just say fictionally, six or eight boxes and make sure all of those players work. Now you've got a time, now you've got a specific time you want to take up this bill and you give it to the minority party and they find one person to say "Nope, not going to happen." Yes, the work load is extremely, obviously much more convoluted and a lot more detailed in the majority and that happened right away.

Then add on to that that you have to make sure someone is in the chair. Presiding officers. Your leadership has to be there more often or somebody guarding the floor has to be there more often. It tripled, literally, overnight. Then on top of that you have a brand new freshman class. A lot of these men and women were certainly not career politicians. For a lot of them this was brand new to them. And you had to do more than show them where the bathroom was. You really had to teach them. There isn't a real good orientation program for how to be a Senator 101. So there was a lot of that, also.

Typically I think in years past, you could rely on the more senior members to do that. The senior members now are getting to be chairmen and they are learning how to be chairmen and hire this staff and the staff directors and move their office. "Oh my gosh, I've wanted this agenda forever. Now I get my agenda of agendas." They didn't have time to teach these almost 20 brand new members how to be a Senator 101. That fell more to the floor staff because we could teach them. A lot of them were willing to sit on the floor and that was the beauty of running the presiding officer's office and the legislative scheduling office, too, because you could encourage them: "You know what sir, you asked me a bunch of questions on how to be a Senator 101, let me throw you in the chair for three or four hours. You can learn it a lot better." It was pretty easy to get them to do that after they got over the intimidation. Letting them know the parliamentarian was right there and they are not going to let them stumble. "If you really want to listen, you can listen to me talk, or you can get the on-the-job training. Let me throw you in the chair."

**Scott:** That's interesting that they'd call your office and ask those kinds of questions. Did they not know who to call?

**Letchworth:** A lot of them brought staff from their states who wouldn't know, and again the more seasoned staff that might be in the office buildings, those people now are going to be staff directors or they are going to be legislative director to a senator that now is a chairman that had never been. Everybody's job was like on steroids overnight. Somebody like a junior floor person like I was that could answer all the questions, it

wouldn't be the logical person to think of, but if you kind of tried one or two people and heard, "I can't do it. I'll call you later," and never got called back, you thought, "Hey I remember this girl on the floor who seemed to have her act together." Before you knew it, yeah, you held these little impromptu, "How to be a Senator 101" sort of sessions.

**Scott:** In a recent interview I did with Dick Baker he talked about the fact that on the Democratic side they had big freshman classes in '76 and '78 so they started their own orientation program precisely for the reason that you are talking about. Huge classes coming in and none of them knew what to do and who to contact. So they try to formalize this procedure so they don't have people calling all over the place.

**Letchworth:** This happened to us all at once. We became chairmen and then you had this huge class. Everybody all of a sudden was on steroids for their jobs. And then you have this huge class of people who didn't know what to do. Nobody had the time to teach them. I shouldn't say nobody had the time, but certainly they had a lot of other things they needed to do so it was harder to find the time to teach these guys. You definitely built a rapport with them. The simple things: "How do I vote? What do I do when I come to vote?" Again you didn't have C-SPAN recordings over and over. You couldn't YouTube it. You couldn't click on a YouTube video and see it. You have to remember it's back then. You definitely needed somebody to tell them how to do all of it.

**Scott:** When someone would call you with those kinds of questions, you'd say, "I can answer them or I can put you in the chair and you can do it." What kind of prep would you give them before they would go out in the chair? A one-on-one session?

**Letchworth:** Sure. You'd have a one-on-one session with them, a lot of times in the lobby. The newer members would say, "Sure, I'll sit in the chair but not until somebody tells me a little bit." We created a little bit of a cheat sheet and we laminated it. But again, as long as you let them know almost right away, the parliamentarian is literally a handshake away from you. He or she is not going to let you flounder or just be a complete boob. It's not going to happen. Once you assured them of that, and you gave them some boilerplate lingo to throw out, it didn't take them long. You sit through a couple of days that seem to be boring. But you learn to take off quorums, put on quorums, get recognition. It didn't take that long.

**Scott:** Were most of the members eager to sit in the chair and have the opportunity to take it?

**Letchworth:** They were once we explained to them that that was the best OJT [on-the-job training]. I can remember a couple of them being really apprehensive and you

had to push them in the direction. But once you got them up there and they got their feet wet, they were fine. Again that was a function of the fact that they didn't want to make a fool of themselves, or make a mistake or hurt the leadership in some way. It didn't take long. And the ones that really wanted to learn quickly almost volunteered for the chair. Of course it made that function of the legislative scheduling office that much nicer. We had to create an award for those that sat in the chair. So we had the Golden Gavel and we created all sorts of stuff like that.

**Scott:** So that started with your office?

**Letchworth:** There may have been other awards, but yeah, we created the Golden Gavel. We would have the vice president come and give them when he could. I have a letter from George H. W. Bush. I had invited him to come and give the Golden Gavel at some particular time and the answer back was that he couldn't because his schedule didn't permit it. He had some grandkids coming up who would soon be page age, could I keep them in mind to be pages? It was a cute little letter. I don't know if you know, but he is famous for his personal letters. When the vice president was in town, we'd have him give them out. You had "atta-boys" in the public policy luncheons. We would give cheat sheets to the leader so that during the policy luncheon he would say, "Hey, did you know that so and so sat in the chair for x hours last week?" If you are a freshman senator and you haven't accomplished very much and your name gets mentioned at the policy luncheon, that can go a long way to get that guy or gal right back in the chair the next week. We constantly were encouraging the leader to talk about the good that you could do in the chair and how important it was. Senator Byrd was wonderful. He did more of the teaching the responsibility of it. You can imagine the professorial part of it—he did a lot of that. Senator Baker was more, atta boys, this is a good thing, you really need to do this for the good of the country and for the good of the party. You are going to learn.

**Scott:** Did they respond well to his leadership?

**Letchworth:** They did. Absolutely.

**Scott:** How big was your staff in the legislative scheduling office?

**Letchworth:** At the high water mark? We had four, including myself. I basically stayed on the floor. We had a direct line from the cloakroom down to 123. There was a gal that did the scheduling every single day. That was her sole responsibility. The other two, whether it was one or two, took the phone calls and the hold letters and updated me with the calendar so that I literally walked around with the calendar. At any given moment, if the leader wanted to pivot to another bill, he would find me, or the party





secretary would find me, and I'd give them my best case scenario. This is going to be a problem or not a problem.

A funny story: We misplaced the mark calendar one time. This was a huge problem because at that point we hadn't thought about keeping a duplicate. It was a Monday and I realized that the mark calendar had been missing. I tried to retrace it and I couldn't remember it from Friday afternoon. We called the sergeant at arms' office and had them halt all the trash leaving the United States Capitol. We had pages going through all the trash. This was an APB of epic proportions because we couldn't reproduce it. We honestly could not. Of course, we didn't want to tell the Democrats that we had lost our secret weapon of sorts. All our secrets were on this document and it was missing. So there was a little bit of a covert operation going on. Pages going through the trash and whatnot. Senator Baker was late that Monday coming in from Tennessee. As he came in he called myself and I think it was Howard Greene down to his office.

**Scott:** Because he had heard about it? He knew the calendar was missing?

**Letchworth:** As we got down there, he says, "Sit down. How was your weekend?" I don't want to waste time with how was your weekend. I'm having a cow that the mark calendar is missing and I want to go dumpster diving at this point trying to find it! He's agonizingly telling us about his weekend and asking how was your weekend. He sort of ceremoniously unsnaps his briefcase and pulls it out. He had swept it up in his papers or his staff did that Friday. He was the last person to speak on our side, they had collected all of his papers and thrown it in. He knew he had it.

**Scott:** [Laughing] He was just playing with you!

**Letchworth:** He was watching us for a couple hours literally have a meltdown because we had lost it. Anyway, the moral of that story is from that day forward we made a Xerox copy of it and that was kept under lock and key. We never lost it again.

**Scott:** That's a great story! Was he a prankster? Did he like to joke?

**Letchworth:** He did. He had a staffer by the name of Jim Miller who was/is a wonderful writer. Jim Miller was actually commandeered by President Reagan to do several very personal interviews with the Reagan family. Senator Baker had weekly meetings and daily meetings. Every once in a while Senator Baker would be leaving on a Friday and he'd tell Jim in the morning, "Do me a favor. Write me a story about this morning's meeting." Jim would basically write a sitcom about the morning staff meeting. I would read them and be rolling in the aisles! He would give personalities—everybody

has a personality. He would exaggerate the personalities. It was a little sitcom. It could have been a daily sitcom. He loved to laugh. He was a prankster at times.

**Scott:** This story would be distributed through the staff?

**Letchworth:** Yes, through some of the staff. Baker would be the first one to read it. I guess he would read it on the plane going home and laugh about it. Jim is very talented. He liked to laugh and he was a prankster.

**Scott:** It sounds like it was a fun working environment, though it must have been very stressful. There is a lot of legislation moving down the pike. You had a lot going on. What are some of the major legislative challenges that you remember in terms of scheduling?

**Letchworth:** I can remember when Reconciliation was first created. Jim Range was one of the first ones—he's now deceased—that had thought about how to manipulate the budget process a little bit. I'm going to be honest—I can remember that being a huge, huge ordeal. What comes to mind also was President [Ronald] Reagan being shot so early and what a whirlwind that put the Senate in, throughout the whole country, but especially the Senate for a while. How disruptive and horrible that was. I remember the days and the day of and where we were with all of that. Getting some budgets through was a real challenge for Senator Baker. A real challenge at times.

**Scott:** Within his own party?

**Letchworth:** Yes, within his own party. The balanced budget amendment was a real challenge. He had some real challenges from the very beginning. And again, not to mention, was it March of 1981 when President Reagan was shot?

**Scott:** Yes, it was right away.

**Letchworth:** There were a lot of speed bumps and a lot of firsts very quickly.

**Scott:** In those early days was there a sense of urgency? A need to get things done quickly or a need to learn quickly on the job because many of these jobs were new for people?

**Letchworth:** I wouldn't say urgency. I remember '94 when you had the Contract with America and you had the 100 days. We didn't have anything quite like that where you had 100 days to change the world or however you want to characterize it. There was

a real sense of, "Let's do this right. Let's learn how to do it and let's do it right." So there was a little more plodding along. Let's get this right. There were members of Congress that were thrilled to death to get this role having been in the minority forever and wanted to hit the ground running. But the leadership for the most part wanted to get it right from the very beginning. There wasn't this sense of, "We've got to pass 10 bills within a certain period of time." There really wasn't that kind of thing.

**Scott:** How long did you stay in the legislative scheduling office?

**Letchworth:** It still exists. I was there until I became the party secretary in 1995. The titles changed a little bit, it became floor assistant. But that's where I hung my hat. That's where my office was.

**Scott:** You always worked out on the floor?

**Letchworth:** I was always on the floor.

**Scott:** That must be where you got the training to become the party secretary?

**Letchworth:** It is. The floor of the cloakroom is sort of an extension of the floor because staffers aren't there with them. You get to know the members as members. Their thought process is their own because the staff isn't there to tell them what to say and do. You get them in an insular kind of way and you learn the personalities pretty quickly and how to work with the personalities pretty quickly. If you build rapport, members of Congress are going to want to notify you of things going on in their life because they don't want their problems or issues or timing to affect the leadership. Heaven forbid that you went out and did something that you had already prescheduled and forgot to tell and the leadership lost a key vote.

**Scott:** How do you keep track of all that in the pre-Internet digital era? How does it work? If someone calls you and says, "My son has a baseball game this afternoon. I want to be gone for two hours," what do you do?

**Letchworth:** You had two basic bible documents that you walked around with and the party secretary walked around with or his staff, which in a lot of cases was me. The mark calendar, which had everything on it as far as legislation. There's a mark calendar for the executive calendar and the legislative calendar. So at any moment if the leader or the party secretary wanted to know what's going on with executive calendar nomination of whomever, you could say (because I typically took most of the calls, or the cloakroom typically took most of the calls) [they could] regurgitate whatever it was back

to me so that I could hand write it on the calendar. I had the best flavor as to how that process would go if they wanted to call up that bill or that nomination. The second thing that you walked around with all the time was an attendance check card. That thing changed a lot. Remember that the cloakroom's day begins—I said it was 9:15, it may still be 9:15—where by 9:30 you could tell the leader what his attendance was going to look like at any given moment. You can't vote between 10 and 12 because 6 people are going to some conference in Vienna, Virginia. But after 12 you can. But it changed all the time.

**Scott:** It seems like it would be changing on the fly—people not being able to come for whatever reason.

**Letchworth:** Sure. And you did get to know members' of Congress's baseball schedules. Literally. You had to, it wasn't that you were prying. Because you did build a rapport with them on the floor, they were very comfortable telling you: "By the way I can't be here for the next hour. I have a root canal and I can't put it off any longer." I can remember telling members of Congress, "You can't have your root canal. Sorry. Here's some drugs"—not literally, but—"go take some meds. You are not going to be able to do that. The only time we can schedule this crucial vote is this time."

**Scott:** In some ways I see this process as unworkable. You have the members in your party all with individual schedules and individual commitments, personal as well as professional. It seems like getting enough people to the floor for a vote at any given period of the day would be incredibly difficult.

**Letchworth:** It is incredibly difficult. That's where the leadership comes in. That's where the leader commands that this be your first priority. And when he loses, that is when the wheels come off the wagon. Occasionally I remember a leader losing that. It didn't take much. Especially if you are in very close ratios, the 51-49 kind of situation, it didn't take much for one or two senators, I call them "brats for the day" collectively. You would kind of look in the back of the chamber and if three or four of them were sort of sitting together and plotting, you would go to the leader and say, "I don't know if you want to stick your head in that little pow-wow. They may be deciding to band together and leave to stop votes." If you had a couple of them that didn't want to finish the bill for the day, they could simply all of a sudden, all four or five of them, leave, and one of them will call you and say, "Elizabeth, I hate to tell you this, but five of us are not going to make the next votes. You better tell the leader." Whether he liked it or not, his day was done. Well, you couldn't have votes and lose. So whether he wanted that bill to get finished, or get past a certain part of the bill, if several of them decided they didn't want that to happen for whatever reason. So there is a constant placating of that. The floor staff and the cloakroom staff sort of get a feel for that. Are there rumblings going on? Are

there problems going on? You let the leader know. Maybe not directly, but the cloakroom staff would tell the party secretary and the party secretary would say, "You want me to check on this? I'm getting some weird feelings about..." All of that is constant. It's all constant. But again, if the leader commands the respect of the party loyalty, that the Senate floor comes first, "Sorry your child's birthday is going to have to come second. I'll carve out something for the birthday party but it can't be from four to eight, it has to be from six to eight. You have to compromise." You do all of that.

**Scott:** And senators would call you directly? Not the office?

**Letchworth:** Typically, yes. That becomes the role or the personality that you give off to them. I can handle this, I will handle this.

I used to leave the office at the end of the day, as the party secretary especially, thinking I did the best job for the majority leader or the minority leader if he was able to stay in his office and play minority leader or majority leader. If he came down to only have to put out fires if they got bigger than something I could deal with. But if he could stay down in his office and not have to come out and do a lot, then I felt like I handled the situations as best I could for him.

**Scott:** This is while you are in the floor assistant, legislative calendar role?

**Letchworth:** In part, yes.

**Scott:** It sounds to me like you'd be working hand in hand with the party secretary all the time.

**Letchworth:** Sure, you work hand in hand with all of them. You become an extension of them. The party secretary will want to be in the meetings. I'm going to say for example, Senator Dole having meetings on welfare. The party secretary is going to want to be in that. So who's going to be on the floor to learn that someone's got a birthday party? Who's going to be on the floor to learn that, "I'm supposed to do this in Vienna, Virginia, at four"? And the more consistent you were of always being the face on the floor, the more they know that, "I can go tell Elizabeth, she's always there. She'll be the one that I can tell. The leader knows to double check with her." You didn't have to be super capable, just almost like the most reliable person. I used to laugh and say I'm the mystery person. The person that, when you open the refrigerator door, the light bulb comes on. I'm always there. You don't know how that happens but it works. I always thought I filled the role best if people thought of me that way.

**Scott:** At this time are you still living with your parents in Virginia? Or have you moved out on your own?

**Letchworth:** At this point, I've moved out on my own at this point. I'm not sure what year we're talking about.

**Scott:** By the time you are in the director of the legislative scheduling office. Are you on your own?

**Letchworth:** Yes, I'm on my own. I was living in Northern Virginia and the suburbs of Maryland doing the apartment thing.

**Scott:** Did you have more time to go out with people that you worked with at that point? Or were you still mostly geared toward work?

**Letchworth:** I liked to say that if a movie came out in the '80s or '90s I probably didn't see it. I don't know the music of the '80s or '90s, really. My sole focus was work.

**Scott:** When you hired the staff for this new office, what kind of qualities were you looking for? Did you need people who were already well grounded in the Senate as an institution? Or could they be people from the outside coming in and getting that first entry level job?

**Letchworth:** Basically, an awful lot of the people who worked in the legislative scheduling office came from other offices. Lynn Grant, for example, was the lady that was hired to do the presiding officer. She was wonderful.

**Scott:** Where did she come from?

**Letchworth:** I want to say one of the committees, I want to say policy committee. She just had incredible organizational skills. She's the one who came up with the schedule. The freshmen would serve five hours a week. She made that whole thing work. She was very diligent. Every morning the presiding officer would get a schedule. When he or she sat in the chair she knew who was going to replace her. Five minutes before, if he or she didn't see, they would call the page who is right down below them. The page had the schedule. The page would call the cloakroom and say, "Can someone call whoever was supposed to be next. They are not here." That person would call down to legislative scheduling and Lynn would get on the phone and say, "Where's your boss?"

**Scott:** Did you ever have trouble with that?

**Letchworth:** Sure, sure. You had members of Congress that had to get out and so and so is late. Some of them would threaten to get up. "No, no sir. You can't get up." "I've got to! My governor's going to meet me in my office." Sure, you would have to run around and find someone in the cloakroom. "Can you go do this for five minutes. So and so in on their way, but he has to leave." You found people in the dining room. I can remember bribing members: "I'll give you a crossword to do. I'll give you the *New York Times* crossword if you'll do this for 10 minutes." They would threaten to behead you if they got stuck in the chair. "I can't be here more than 10 minutes." That was a constant battle. You can imagine, people are never really on time. The fact that we had the cheat sheet in front of the presiding officer meant that he knew who to look for. A lot of them would start asking the pages 10 or 15 minutes before, "Is he on his way? Has he left yet?"

**Scott:** Eager to get out of the chair.

**Letchworth:** Yes, eager to get out. Clearly Lynn set this system up so that the right people knew, had these sheets and you could start checking the boxes and making sure it ran as smoothly as it did, given that everyone's schedule was crazy.

**Scott:** The other staff members, what kind of tasks did they have?

**Letchworth:** It was a lot of secretarial work. Typing things, but being very thorough.

**Scott:** They generally came from other offices as well.

**Letchworth:** A lot of times from offices where people liked their performances and liked the jobs they did but for whatever reason their term was up, their time was up, they were going to be replaced with somebody else. But if you need a young person who could do the hours, she or he is great.

**Scott:** Were they more frequently women in your office than men?

**Letchworth:** They were almost always women, and I don't know why. But they were almost all women.

**Scott:** It strikes me that from the time that you came to the Senate in 1975 until the time you retired in 2001, it's a very different institution in terms of the number of women who work in positions of power or even in other positions. Did you have a sense for that as you were working in the Senate?

**Letchworth:** You did get a sense for it. Every once in a while you'd stop and pause and say, "Geez, the secretary of the Senate is now a woman. Ten years ago, I never would have thought that. The assistant parliamentarian is a woman." Senator Lott did something, I can get you the date—I can't remember off the top of my head—he had a women's day. A woman senator opened the Senate—I have a picture of it.

**Scott:** I do too!

**Letchworth:** We didn't pass a resolution to allow National Geographic to take a picture. I think somebody took a picture of the Senate from the TV. A woman senator, I believe it was Senator [Susan] Collins, Elizabeth McDonough was the parliamentarian. Every spot on the rostrum, every spot on the floor was a woman. And there was Senator Lott making the announcement. It was pretty neat.

**Scott:** It is pretty neat.

**Letchworth:** I remember he thought of that one night sitting in the office. We were puzzling through—He was talking about the rostrum and how the face of it had changed even in the short time that he had been there. He asked, is there a way it can be all women? He and I walked through all the steps and said, "Yes, you can put a woman in every one of the positions. Let's do that one day." I don't remember why we picked the day. We picked the day and set it up so for five minutes nothing but women in the Senate. That was pretty neat.

**Scott:** What do you attribute that to—the entrance of more women into positions in the Senate. That has really happened since the mid '70s.

**Letchworth:** I think women tend to be more organized. If you look at the Senate from the outside, it looks so disorganized. For it to have any kind of function or organizational skills, you need people who can give it whatever organization it can have and women tend to do that better. They just tend to do that better. I don't know what that says about us. To me it became obvious to the people in power that—if you think about it, I would have to say that the majority of the senators have women personal secretaries and they are the ones that organize their day. Think about it now. You have Lula Davis who is the secretary for the majority. I think it just became obvious more and more. If I have a woman in my office organizing my day, why wouldn't it make as much sense as possible to have women in and around the floor that keep it as organized as possible. It is a disorganized creature by virtue of the fact that all 100 senators are equal in so many



ways, so it can't be as organized, but as organized as it possibly can, I think women tend to do that a little bit better.

**Scott:** We've had other people tell us about the changing dress codes for women in the Senate. When you came in for example, there was a skirts only policy. And that continued up into the '90s.

**Letchworth:** I can remember having to tell a Republican woman senator that she couldn't be sleeveless. Sitting in the chair like that was risqué. I can remember her looking at me like, are you crazy? You are nuts! And scampering around looking for a blazer to give her. She had come in with a conservative dress on, but it was sleeveless. It was probably July, I don't remember. But I can remember thinking this is going to be a little awkward. Yes, I can remember pants were sort of okay on Fridays there for a while for women to wear. Now, gosh, it's pants all the time. Obviously it's come of its age. It's finally come around. I can remember it being very awkward. I can remember some of the doorkeepers coming up to me asking me, "Could you tell Senator So and so," because they were men. But basically the sergeant at arms had a rule to let them know that they needed to put the jacket on.

**Scott:** You work in this legislative scheduling office, on the floor, right up until 1995 when you became the party secretary. What are some of the milestones in the changes that come to that office during that time? Are they mainly technological in terms of the way that you can distribute information because of the new technologies?

**Letchworth:** A lot of it is technological. That's a huge part of it. The holds are still done the same way. You still have the communication. You want that communication. You don't want somebody saying Senator So and so is putting a hold on it. You want to say, well how serious is this hold? Is he going to throw his body in front of the train? Or does he just want to buy a couple of days? That makes a difference as to how you regurgitate that to the party secretary and/or the leader. You still have a lot of that personal. I don't see that ever changing where you could send some kind of form in by e-mail or something. You really need that communication. A lot of that communication is done on the floor. A lot of it is done member to the party secretary during roll-call votes or whatever. Remember, he or she is planning, especially if they are in the majority, the next move. A bill is pending now but you've already gotten the marching orders from the leader: what's next, what's next, what's next. As that bill is chugging along, the floor staff are trying to make the bill process along and meanwhile you, the party secretary, might be working on the next bill trying to get a time agreement or trying to work out who can be where, when, why. That part of it I don't ever see really being part of this new technology wave.

**Scott:** About the holds and the degree of seriousness to which they are submitting a hold. Are these things that you want to understand to be able to pass along to the leader?

**Letchworth:** You want to be able to say, "He's not going to budge until Thursday because of something that is going to magically happen on Thursday." You learned all of that. You learned to probe without probing but ask more questions maybe than he or the staff might give you. You also sort of, as the keeper of the holds—I can remember using a little reverse psychology on a member or two, knowing that they had a lot of holds. Did you want to exploit that and bring up what I call the "hog factor" or the "pig factor?" "Okay, Senator, you have holds on FIFTEEN bills. How about letting one of these go?" Whereas the majority leader or the minority leader wouldn't necessarily know that. You could tell that to the majority leader but it's just sort of easier for me to do it.

If you knew that one of the members of Congress was a little more humble than the other guy you might say, "So sir, we're going to work on a time agreement. Can I put you down for 30 amendments?" Shame them into thinking, "I don't want to come across as being a pig here." You know they wouldn't necessarily say that but you could kind of see that in their head. "No, Elizabeth, three or four would be good." I was shooting for two or three to begin with but I probably couldn't have gotten that if I'd started out with, "Can I put you down for three?" "No, I want ten."

But you could only learn that by knowing the whole big picture. That was the beauty of having the mark calendar and keeping it. Really the party secretary still has a good hold on that. It's not that it's such a high-falutin' part of his or her job. It's the knowledge base that you garner from that. You get the flavor of a little bit of everything. The two party secretaries work so closely in trying to bring the civility to the chamber. The two leaders do, too, but the party secretaries know the nitty-gritty of what they said. Is that even possible to be able to get done? The two party secretaries can share, without details, "I don't know if we are ever going to be able to give you that kind of agreement." If I shared that with the other party secretary she or he would go back to the leader and say, "We're never going to get one that's going to be five hours. How about trying ten hours?" The leader may have to go back to the guys and gals that wanted the five hours. You sort of rebrand whatever it is in an effort to try to get something moving. Because they have more of the inside scoop, again by virtue of the roles. It's morphed into that.

**Scott:** You're talking about a job that has really transitioned over time.

**Letchworth:** It really has. You have to remember that the beginning of it was Oliver Dompierre going to lunch for too long and handing this ragged calendar marked with a red pen—he actually gave me the pens that I had to use—and saying, “Mark this down.” It could have been because I have good penmanship. From that to where it is now is fairly amazing. But it is the keeper of how the Senate floor is going to operate. If you wanted to try to crystal ball anything and get a good perspective on how it was going to work or how it was going to play out.

**Scott:** You have to understand procedure and you had the chance to learn all that before you get to these positions. But it strikes me that you have to be a quick read. You have to learn about individuals relatively quickly and know how you can talk to them.

**Letchworth:** That’s true. Senator Lott probably paid me the nicest compliment and it wasn’t paid to me, it was paid to my secretary who then told me. Senator Lott knew my secretary, Pat Wade, from years earlier. He bumped into her in the hallway one day and said, “I am so lucky to have Elizabeth. I have never met anybody who can read the Senate as well as she can. It probably comes from her being there as young as she was.” And that’s it. I’m not clairvoyant. I really am not. It may be the function of being wedged between two boys. It could be a combination of something that simple. How to resolve problems or how to read and get answers quickly because you had a brother on either side of you fighting over the same teddy bear. You know, I can’t really say. But you are right, you do have to be able to assess really quickly and hopefully your assessment is correct because you are going to encourage the majority leader to act on that assessment. He may know something completely different that you don’t know. He’ll add all that into it and he may make the assessment as to a combination of this knowledge and that knowledge. They don’t want to come out on the floor and be wrong over and over again. “We’re going to finish this bill at four.” Five days later, they lose credibility. Of course they are going to lose the respect of their members. You’ve messed up everybody’s schedule. They need to be as accurate as possible trying to predict what 100 men and women are going to do at any given moment. That’s tough.

**Scott:** So it’s in their best interest to let you in on whatever information they may have in order for you to figure out how to move forward.

**Letchworth:** Yes. And the party secretary the same way. Only when asked though. You don’t want to pelt the leader with nonsense. To him it’s going to sound like nonsense. It’s a need to know basis, in other words. “Leader, what do you want to do next?” And then you regurgitate what you think that next would be like in his life. How does he want the next to play out? And you let him know that’s either going to happen easily or that’s going to be a struggle. How much have you put into this? How much have

you invested into that being next? Especially if you have the White House. The Bush administration for example, the White House and the majority party and you want to sing off the same song sheet. If the White House has said Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday is going to be education week because the president is going to be hopping all over the country talking about education. The majority leader says, "Elizabeth, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday is going to be education week." "Whoops, that's going to be a tough lift. And this is why. But I think if you do this right and that right and that right you can make it a good education." Or, "That's not going to work at all, is there any way we can make it something else?" The leader wants to be correct in how he predicts how the floor is going to look, how the flow is going to go. You don't want to make false promises or idle threats. A leader that makes idle threats over and over, pretty soon it's like the person that cries wolf. Every Thursday saying we're going to be in all day Friday and you never are, people are going to start making their reservations for seven o'clock Thursday, doesn't matter if he's said it ten times. If enough people take that seven o'clock Thursday flight, it's a *fait accompli* so you figure that out, too. The leader wants to be as accurate as he can be trying to predict what 100 men and women will do at any given time.

**Scott:** And that is pretty unpredictable.

**Letchworth:** It can be. Which is why I believe Senator Lott titled his book, *Herding Cats*.

**Scott:** I think this has been a fantastic interview. I'm so happy that you were able to come by and I look forward to working with you again. I think we'll end there so that you can get out of here on time.

**Letchworth:** That works. Thank you.