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Interview #6: With Howard Baker

(Monday, April 29, 1985)

Interviewed by Donald A. Ritchie

Ritchie: You sat out the 1977 leadership race between [Howard Baker](#) and [Robert Griffin](#). I wondered if you could give me some assessment as to how and why Howard Baker won that race.

Hildenbrand: My guess would be that Griffin probably lost it more than Howard Baker won it. I'm not really sure. Baker came awfully close the two times that he ran against [Hugh Scott](#). In that period of time, there really wasn't much of a change. There were like four people that we lost in '72, and '74, I don't know, maybe a couple more, but there weren't that many changes. Plus some new people came in in that period of time. I guess that Griffin sort of felt there was a succession that went along with the job, and that he didn't work maybe as hard as he should have worked. Also, I think Baker did what he did the second time he ran against us, and that's he lulled them in the sense that nobody had announced they were going to run. He didn't announce it until the morning of the vote -- which he had done with us one time. Whether Griffin forgot that, or just decided that there wasn't going to be a challenge, I don't know. Then Griffin's staff was quoted as saying that they were lied to by somebody, so you put all of that together. Plus, [Chuck Percy](#) was skiing in Switzerland. I have no idea of where he was going to be.

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But all in all I think that it was a surprise. Even though we knew that Baker had a lot of support, I don't think that Griffin thought he was going to lose. I think Griffin thought he had the votes when he went in that morning.



U.S. Senate Historical Office
Senators Hugh Scott (R-PA) and Howard Baker (R-TN)
Senate Historical Office

Ritchie: The whip is usually in a position to do favors for people. He's on the floor a lot. Doesn't he pick up a lot of IOUs?

Hildenbrand: Well, that's true if you happen to be the majority whip, but as the minority whip you can't do anything for anybody, really. You could say, "Help me, I don't want to vote tonight. Can you take care of it?" Well, if you don't have the control, as the majority has, it's hard for you to do that, unless you decided to stand up and filibuster so that they can't have a vote. Very few people ask a leader to do that. There's not a lot that the whip can really do except be on the floor, be partisan when it's called upon to be partisan, and do whatever the leader wants him to do. I guess you have to establish a credibility among your colleagues that they think that you would become a good leader.

I've never really tried to figure out what members look for in a leader. My guess is that it has less to do with substance and political philosophy than it simply does with personality. I have no idea why Scott beat Baker, for example. Philosophically, Baker had more votes certainly, but it didn't turn out that way. Then you've

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got Griffin-Baker, from a political philosophy there's not that much to choose between the two of them. Why Baker won, I don't know.

Ritchie: Was Griffin a difficult person to work with?

Hildenbrand: I didn't find him so, but here again I had known Bob since 1957, because he came into the House the same time I was on staff over there. We had been friends since that time -- that's a long period of time, twenty years. I did not find him that difficult to work with. He was a perfectionist. As most lawyers, he always wanted to make some changes for the sake of making changes. There was at one time passed around the Lincoln Gettysburg Address as they visualized Griffin would have corrected it if had been submitted to him and he was going to make the speech. But that's the way lawyers have a tendency to be, and Bob was no exception. But he certainly knew the floor, he knew the legislative process. He would have been a good leader, I don't think there's any question. Whether he would have been as good as Howard Baker, I don't think you'll ever know. The thing about Howard Baker that nobody else will be able to judge him on is that he's the only majority leader that anybody remembers, as far as the Republicans are concerned. So people are going to have to be judged against Howard Baker, rather than Howard Baker judged against somebody else.

Ritchie: Also at that time the Republicans lost the White House and a Democratic administration was coming in. How important

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is it in terms of a party's self-perception in picking a leader? They were going to be the minority party without a president of their own in the White House. Did that play any role in the decision?

Hildenbrand: Well, it could. Again, I go back to the earlier statement that I made that you have to try to get each member to determine what he looks for, or what he is looking for, in a leader, and it well could be that they were looking for someone who they felt was a little more articulate than Bob Griffin, and that they placed less of a store on his ability to work on the floor, since with a new administration, with a Democrat administration, with Democrat control in the Senate, there wasn't really that much for the opposition to do but oppose, and they may have just decided for whatever their reasons that they needed someone other than Bob. They needed a new image. With the White House going Democratic they needed somebody new to present their platform and their programs. I don't know.

Ritchie: In the two races that Baker ran against Scott, you had worked for Scott.

Hildenbrand: Yes.

Ritchie: Did you feel that that put you in a vulnerable position when Baker became minority leader?

Hildenbrand: I never really thought about it. Obviously it did, but I had been elected in 1974 by the entire Senate Republicans,

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and with Baker winning by one vote, it seemed to me that he was not in any position to go out and say we're going to make the changes and get rid of the secretary of the minority. I hadn't made any enemies that I knew of in that period of time, so there was no reason for them to get rid of me, unless it was simply to make a change. I did know that Baker's staff desperately wanted me out, and in fact told Senator Baker that the first thing he ought to do was to get rid of me. But my friendship with Howard had been so good, even despite the fact that he ran against us twice and lost, and knowing him as well as I did, it never crossed my mind that he might decide that he wanted to make a change in that area. I'd worked with him, I knew him, he knew me. As I said, there was nobody that I knew of that was out for my scalp, except the staff. He as much as told me that the first thing staff told him he had to do was get rid of me. But that was a vengeance that they were going to try to wreak on me.

Ritchie: Vengeance for what?

Hildenbrand: For the fact that I had been involved with Scott in beating Baker twice. They were going to get even. But Howard Baker is not that type of a person.

Ritchie: When Baker became leader, did he express to you the directions that he wanted to go in?

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Hildenbrand: No, we had a lot of mutual respect for one another, and the manner in which he went just was something that evolved as we went along on a day-to-day basis. I had a role to play and he let me play that role. It was the same role that I did for Hugh Scott when I was secretary of the minority under him. He made no changes, and I became eventually as close to him as I was with Scott.

Ritchie: I was going to ask you if you could compare Baker and Scott as leaders, and what his brand of leadership was like.

Hildenbrand: I don't really think there's that much difference in the two; I think that Baker brought a freshness to the office that Scott did not bring, simply because Scott had been doing it for thirty or forty years. For Baker it was brand new. He'd only been there ten years, and so he brought a totally different outlook. He learned, I think, a lot, quietly, behind-the-scenes, watching Scott operate with a Republican president. Again, it's hard to compare because Scott had [Nixon](#) for the entire time, and this was the first time since [Lyndon Johnson](#) that we had a

Democrat president. So here again it's like oranges and apples. It's a different leadership when you've got the White House than it is when you don't.

Baker also had the pleasure of having a more united Republican party in the Senate than Scott did, because that was after '74 and Wyman-Durkin, and the Republicans were used to being together as a

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group, and that carried over. I think that the programs and the policies that Baker and [Jack Javits](#) and the Policy Committee were able to formulate during those four years was in a great deal responsible for eventually getting control of the Senate -- although, a president like [Reagan](#) running as strong as he did doesn't hurt.

Ritchie: You mention Wyman-Durkin as a unifying force, but it seems to me that there were also some divisive forces, like single issues -- the abortion issue in particular. Were they beginning to pull apart some of this unity?

Hildenbrand: Well, they became more divisive after we took the majority, because they didn't have control enough to bring them up on the floor, and when they did they had to bring them up in some funny bill that had nothing to do with it, so it was easy to defeat them. You know, you put abortion on a tax bill and you know it's not going to have a long life. They were still in a position of crying in the wilderness. They didn't have the forum that they had when they became a majority. You put Strom Thurmond in as chairman of the Judiciary Committee and you get all sorts of abortion language on the floor. You don't have that when you're ranking, you can't do very much about it. So the single issues hadn't really come out as much as they have been in the last four or five years.

Ritchie: How well did Baker work with the "New Right" senators and their supporters?

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Hildenbrand: Well, he didn't have any problem with them. Philosophically in some areas he was close to the positions that they took. He was certainly more closely allied than Bob Griffin would have been. It wasn't until Panama Canal that Baker fell out with the far right.

Ritchie: I wondered in the sense that he strikes me at heart as a very pragmatic politician. How does he deal with somebody who really is emotionally charged on an issue?

Hildenbrand: Just let them go. Leadership brings about a denormalization of your own political philosophy. You sort of suborn it to everything else because it's hard to be a good leader and be up there espousing your own philosophy and your own programs, and your own policies. That's not the job of a leader. A leader is to lead that flock the way they want to be, from a majority standpoint. You carry their banner rather than them trying to carry yours. He would let the opposition try to deal with them more than he would try to deal with them. He'd get them all together in the room and say, "Go at it. What do you want to do?" Then he'd sit and listen and then he'd offer whatever he thought was a reasonable compromise, if there was such a thing as a reasonable compromise.

His was a compromise leadership, whereas [Bob Dole](#), I guess, is going to have confrontational leadership. I don't think anybody's in a position to say what's right or what's wrong. You have to deal

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with it, given the circumstances and the time, whether you can get by on a confrontational basis or whether you have to compromise. I think what Baker felt is with Reagan as a new president it was important to get as much of the Reagan program through as we could get through, and to show the country that we could in fact govern -- we hadn't done it in a long time. So I think he went out of his way to make whatever compromises and agreements he needed to make in order to get those policies and those programs through, in whatever form he had to get them through. You could take the other side of it and have gotten nothing done, which really wouldn't have made very much sense.

Ritchie: The years that Baker was minority leader coincided with the years that [Carter](#) was president. I wondered if you could give me some evaluation of Jimmy Carter from the Senate Republicans' perspective.

Hildenbrand: I think that probably they would say that he was smart enough to have some fairly good people around him -- although that would not necessarily be the case in terms of his liaison staff. You know, he hired a good old boy from Georgia, Frank Moore, who was a lovely person but didn't have any more idea what the Senate liaison or congressional liaison was all about than anybody else. So that created some problems. But Carter was not a strong president along the lines of a Nixon or a Lyndon Johnson, so it wasn't that hard to

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deal with him. He didn't have the programs that [Jack Kennedy](#) had, for example. He wasn't going to remake the world or the wheel. I'm not so sure that he knew why he got there. But he was there. Had he been a different type of a president, my guess is that it would have been a different 1980 than it was.

He was what, the first Southern president, if you don't count Lyndon Johnson, who was sort of a mistake that happened. The first Southern president in Lord knows how long, since Reconstruction maybe. That made a difference, I think, because people's perception was that he doesn't reflect the views of the United States. That was a perception that we had of Southerners, that they were different in some regards. He never was one that he could force his views on the nation as a whole, because people had a feeling that they weren't the views of everybody.

Ritchie: There's a perception, I think that Carter was very unsuccessful with Congress. Carter tries to argue, in his memoirs, that he got about 75 percent of what he asked for, but I think the general perception was that he was much less successful -- especially considering that he had Democratic majorities in both the House and the Senate. How would you rate him in terms of his dealings with Congress?

Hildenbrand: I would agree with most people. I don't think he got anywhere near 75 percent of what he wanted. It's like voting

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records: you can formulate anybody's voting record to have it say anything you want it to say, if you pick out the right votes. I can make [Jesse Helms](#) a liberal if I just take ten votes out of five hundred that he may have cast. And I think this is the same kind of thing with Carter. Depending on what he uses for his 75 percent he could make the claim, but I don't think anybody else thinks that. I don't really think that most people feel that it was a strong presidency the four years that he was there. And I think he will be remembered probably for Iran almost more than anything else, as Nixon, despite all that Nixon did, will always be remembered for the fact that he had to resign, and because of Watergate. I think the same is true of Carter. Carter's administration will be known simply because of the hostages in Iran, and the ill-fated attempt to rescue them.

Ritchie: Given the fact that Carter had Democratic majorities in both bodies, and he was the first Democratic president in eight years, why would you say that he was so unsuccessful in mustering support in Congress?

Hildenbrand: Mainly because the programs that he wanted to put forward were not the ones that these people up here wanted. And you have to remember, he was not one of them. He was the first president to come along since Eisenhower who was not of the Congress. They didn't think that he knew what the country wanted. They were the

representatives and the spokesmen of the country, he was a governor of Georgia. I don't think that [Bob Byrd](#) and [Tip O'Neill](#) were going to go down and do everything that Jimmy Carter wanted them to do. And again, you have the same problem that other presidents have had: they don't want to feel as if it is a community leadership, or a community president. They didn't want to call Tip O'Neill and Byrd down and say, "I'd like to do this, and here's what I'm thinking, do you have any suggestions of how we might get this done." They didn't want any part of that. They wanted to make the decision; this is the program; and send it up and say, "Now, do it." And they said, "We're not going to do that."

Ritchie: I was reading Carter's memoirs, and he attributed his problems to pushing too much too soon in his congressional program. Do you think that's an accurate assessment?

Hildenbrand: Volume isn't always necessarily the answer. My guess is if it was good it wouldn't have made any difference. This body is capable of handling almost anything it wants to handle, whenever it wants to handle it. But you can't lead this body; water seeks its own level, and so does Congress. If it's good, if the programs are good, and if the country is responsive to those programs, this body will enact them. But if it isn't, it doesn't matter whether you send two programs or two thousand, it won't make any difference.

Ritchie: The other interesting thing I saw in Carter's memoirs was a quote from his diary in which he said that he found that he was more comfortable around Southern Democrats and Republicans than he was around liberals. Was that evident in his dealings with the Congress?

Hildenbrand: No. You'd have to be stupid to let that come out during his presidency. He wasn't a hail-fellow-well-met. He didn't have people down all the time for drinks. He sure didn't come up on the Hill the way Lyndon Johnson did. So whatever he says is fine. But there was no evidence that he was more or less comfortable with one or the others. But it would stand to reason that raised where he was raised, and coming from where he came from, that he would be more comfortable with Southern Democrats and conservative Republicans, certainly than with a [Pat Moynihan](#) or a [Pat Leahy](#) or a [Ted Kennedy](#).

Ritchie: I saw the same thing reflected in a statement that Senator Baker made at the end of the 95th Congress. He said, "We have a Democratic president who's singing a Republican tune."

Hildenbrand: Yes, I don't know where he made that, in some speech someplace. That's a good campaign kind of thing, that you can use in campaigns. What it also does is it just alienates the Democrats. They just get apoplectic when they think that their president is in bed with Republicans. You always try to divide and conquer. If you can split the other side, that's fine.

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Ritchie: It was always hard to perceive Carter as either a liberal or a conservative.

Hildenbrand: I'm not sure he knew what he was, except from his background. He never certainly could be what we would consider mainstream. There was nothing in his training that would indicate that. He did make some attempts -- I don't recall specifics -- to be more of a people president, and reflect some other parts of the country, but that's hard to do. First of all, you don't understand the other parts of the country, which is also a problem. You don't have any major metropolitan industrial areas for example; so when you start talking about a black problem, or an unemployment problem, that's hard when you come from some funny little town in Georgia. You don't know much about either one of those things.

Ritchie: Early on in his presidency, Carter tackled water projects, threatening to veto major water projects as part of the congressional pork barrel. Was that a foolish move on his part?

Hildenbrand: It didn't make that much difference. This body is used to presidents doing that. He's not the first one, and my guess is he won't be the last. I can remember Lyndon Johnson taking money out of the highway trust fund because he didn't want to build anymore roads. Alan Boyd was then the Secretary of Transportation, and he had to come up before [John McClellan](#), I guess, who was chairman of the Appropriations Committee, and try to explain why this president

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thought he could affect a rescission of all of the money that was in the trust fund supposedly to build highways. But that was the way Lyndon Johnson was, and that's the way presidents are. They have to continue to exert the prerogatives they think they have as the President of the United States, and that is, if they decided there's not going to be anymore roads, there's not going to be anymore roads. But it doesn't work that way, and he found that out.

Water projects, of all things, because they effect almost every district -- if you veto it you haven't got a vote to sustain, because somebody's project is in there,

probably. And if it isn't in there, it's going to be in the next time, so you can't afford to vote against your friends who are going to put your project in the next time there's a bill. There are things that you pick that you can get away with vetoes and win, but pork barrel doesn't happen to be one of them.

Ritchie: You don't think it unnecessarily soured his relations with Congress?

Hildenbrand: I don't think his relations were ever that good that they had to be soured. I don't think it made that much difference. By that time, it was so confrontational between the White House, there was such an adversarial relationship that Nixon had established, and [Ford](#) wasn't there long enough to change it. So they were still smarting from all of the Nixon days, and I think that

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Carter inherited some of that feeling -- not against him, but just against the White House trying to dictate to the Congress. He may have paid for some of that.

Ritchie: Some of those chairmen had been chairmen for decades.

Hildenbrand: Oh, yes. [John Stennis](#), [Russell Long](#).

Ritchie: [Scoop Jackson](#).

Hildenbrand: Scoop Jackson.

Ritchie: [Warren Magnuson](#) had been chairman of the Commerce Committee since the '50s.

Hildenbrand: Yes, those chairmen had been there a long time, and no upstart was going to tell them how to do things.

Ritchie: Probably Carter's biggest success in the Senate was the Panama Canal treaties in '78, he spent months on that one issue alone. Howard Baker's support of that obviously had a lot to do with him getting those treaties ratified. Why did Baker support Carter on Panama?

Hildenbrand: First of all, I don't think it's accurate to say that that was Carter's proposal. Four presidents had formulated treaties and attempted to give the Panama Canal back to the

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Panamanians. And in reality, Carter sent the treaty up, and that was all he did. The State Department, Warren Christopher and his people, were more

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responsible than anybody else for the Panama Canal treaty. Carter himself did not play that much of a role. When we dealt with anybody, we always dealt with the State Department relative to the Panama Canal. When they put the Byrd-Baker amendment together, it went through Warren Christopher and those people, and they were talking to Torrijos about whether they could accept this or not accept it. So I don't think Carter played a role in the Panama Canal.

Baker felt that it was the right thing to do. Nixon had espoused it, Johnson, Ford, Kissinger thought it was the thing to do. There wasn't anyone who had been in a position of power within the field of international politics who opposed the Panama Canal treaty. It was only the Ronald Reagans and the conservatives who were getting apoplectic about that canal. Baker held off a long time before he made a decision as to what he was going to do. He went down to Panama. He hired two consultants. He had one, Edward Lutvak, and another one, I can't recall his name, who took both ends of the treaty, opposing it and supporting it. They were hired as consultants and were involved in everything that happened. When we went to Panama, they went along.

We went down to see Torrijos. And I think that Baker was impressed by Torrijos, and in talking with the people down in Panama,

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seeing the thing. The generals who were down there in charge of Southcom, they all made points for support of the treaty. The Americans who were there in the Zone, their case was not so strong, because it was built on: what's going to happen to our tenure, what's going to happen to our jobs, what's going to happen to our salaries. All of those things were what were concerning them, not whether the relationships between the two countries was going to be enhanced by the canal being returned to Panama, and our standing in the rest of that Hemisphere. All of that, I think, played a part in Howard Baker's ultimate decision that he wanted to support the treaty. The polls out of Tennessee certainly did not reflect support for the treaty, and he had a terrible time in the campaign, with the conservatives going after him on that basis. The Democrat lady couldn't do very much, because it was her president, but the conservatives sure were very vocal, and the conservative Democrats.

Ritchie: Did you go with Baker on that trip to Panama?

Hildenbrand: Yes, I went to Panama more times than I care to remember. I went with [\[Ernest Hollings\]](#) and [Bill Scott](#) in August. I went with Byrd in November, and back with Baker in January. So I'd been there at least three times before the treaty vote.

Ritchie: How were these organized? Was the State Department encouraging senators to go?

Hildenbrand: No, this was just something that the leaders decided that if they were going to have to support this, and if they were going to have to ask their colleagues to support it, they wanted to know what it exactly was they were dealing with. Byrd took six Democrats when he went, and asked Howard Liebengood and I to go, so there would be some representation of the Republican leadership on the trip. So he took six Democrats plus himself on that trip, and everyone of the them that was on that trip voted for the treaty.

Ritchie: I know on the trip that Baker made he took [Jake Garn](#) and [John Chafee](#) with him.

Hildenbrand: Garn and Chafee, yes.

Ritchie: Garn voted against the treaty.

Hildenbrand: And we knew that when Garn went down, but he and Jake were good friends and their wives liked each other. And it was an opportunity for Garn to see exactly what we were talking about, and what was going to happen, and to meet Torrijos. You never know, something could have happened and he could have decided to change his mind.

Ritchie: I wondered also if he had deliberately taken along someone who was clearly leaning for the treaty and someone who was leaning against the treaty?

Hildenbrand: Yes, just as he had two staff people, one for it and one against it in consulting areas. He did that with malice aforethought.

Ritchie: Supposedly, some senators told Baker that no Republican who voted for that treaty would ever get the Republican nomination for president in 1980. Did that enter into his consideration?

Hildenbrand: No. There were those who said he would never get reelected in Tennessee. But he had made the decision, he felt it was a right decision, and he was going to take his chances on '80 and '78.

Ritchie: He's supposed to have told Carter: "If I keep voting right on all these issues I won't win the next election!"

Hildenbrand: Yes.

Ritchie: He and Byrd worked closely in putting together the Byrd-Baker amendment. Was that something that came out of the Senate, or was that something suggested by the State Department?

Hildenbrand: No, it came out of the Senate. Once that treaty got up here, it was really the Senate's baby. The administration was here, and they were available, but what happened was that Baker and Byrd made a decision that they were going to do whatever was

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necessary to get the treaty adopted, as long as they could do it with the blessing of Carter and Torrijos. Whatever it took to get it passed -- that was the way it was sold to Carter and the way it was sold to Torrijos: without this, you don't have a treaty. You're going to have to live with this, and we hope that you can.

[Ed Brooke](#), for example, I worked closely with him in negotiations. He had a problem, and I don't recall what it was now, with something in the treaty. We tried to fashion, and finally fashioned an amendment, which satisfied him, and he voted for the treaty. He did not want to vote for it originally, because of the problem, but we worked on it. Ambler Moss, who later became the ambassador to Panama, was Christopher's right-hand man during all those negotiations, and was very, very close with Torrijos. He was the one that was our liaison with the White House and with the State Department, in trying to get things accomplished, and trying to convince them that we needed to do this or the treaty was lost.

Ritchie: How did Baker operate in the sense that perhaps a majority of the Republicans in the Senate were opposed to the treaties? How did he operate as a leader under those circumstances?

Hildenbrand: He turned it over to [Paul Laxalt](#), and Laxalt led the fight against the canal treaty. Baker just worked with those individuals who were already supporters of the treaty, and he worked

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with those individuals who were on the fence and hadn't decided what they wanted to do. Then of course, he worked with the Democrats, and with the State Department.

Ritchie: It was sort of a tightrope operation, to be a leader of your party when your party was leaning in the other direction.

Hildenbrand: Well, yes, but here again he had Nixon and Ford both strongly in support of the treaty. So he had some backing. The conservatives had Ronald Reagan. There wasn't much that they could do. They were going to oppose it. There was never any talk of impeaching Baker or doing anything. A lot of that, I think, has to go to Paul Laxalt. I think Paul's manner in treating the leader, even though he was leading the fight in opposition to that treaty, and knew that Baker was not, the way in which he treated Baker through all of that, and the discussions that they had through all of that, also was helpful. Because that group needs a leader, and Laxalt was sort of the titular head. He was Reagan's closest friend in the Senate. Even though Reagan wasn't president, but nevertheless everybody knew that he was in fact Reagan's closest friend and was going to be very much involved in the 1980 convention. And he was not about to take on Howard Baker. So it was like a snake without a head; they didn't really have a place to go and nobody to lead them, because Laxalt wouldn't put up with that kind of nonsense.

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Ritchie: Were you surprised at how emotional the Panama Canal issue became?

Hildenbrand: No. Conservatives are always emotional, no matter what the issue is. If it's something that they're either violently for or violently against, they're emotional about it. You look at all of the issues, you'll find that they're very emotional, particularly when it comes to God and Country and Flag. They just sort of felt that we were selling out the United States, turning that canal back to the Republic of Panama. Almost traitorous, I guess, to some of them.

Ritchie: Baker must have felt intense pressure on him.

Hildenbrand: Up until the time he made the decision and it became public that he was in fact going to support it, along with the Baker-Byrd amendment, there was of course a lot of pressure on him. But once he made that decision, and once it was announced, they knew where he was going to go, and they let him alone. They knew he wasn't going to change his mind, which, as it turned out, he didn't. But there was never any doubt how he was going to vote, once he made that decision.

Ritchie: Some of the books that I've looked at give Robert Byrd most of the credit for getting the Panama Canal treaty through. Would you go along with that assessment?

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Hildenbrand: No. There was enough credit to go around. I don't think that anybody can say that they did it, we did it. I think the Baker-Byrd amendment

probably is more responsible for the passage of the treaty than anything else, but I don't think that Byrd could take anymore credit than Howard Baker could take, for example. It was easier for Byrd, because most of his people supported it anyway. And he sure didn't convince any Republicans. Any Republicans who got convinced, got convinced by Howard Baker. Anybody who wants to write and take credit for it, I think, can go ahead and do it. They're as right as anybody else would be.

Ritchie: I gather that people didn't think that [John Sparkman](#), as chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, provided much leadership on behalf of the treaty.

Hildenbrand: Well, Sparkman was getting old at that time. There were a lot of people on the Foreign Relations Committee that did not necessarily feel that he reflected the views of the administration in all areas. And he was a different type of a person, certainly, than a [Bill Fulbright](#). Fulbright was very, very strong, whether you agreed or disagreed, he was very strong and very articulate. Sparkman was a Southerner. Liberals did not necessarily trust him, although he was more moderate than a lot of the Southern Democrats. There wasn't really that much role for him to play. He, in the Senate, could not have done for that treaty what Bob Byrd did. He

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didn't have the stature that Bob Byrd had. It needed somebody, the leadership had to get behind this, it was not going to be done by committee chairmen. So Sparkman didn't have that much of a role to play, really.

Ritchie: Byrd was relatively new as majority leader, and this was a test of his ability to deliver, wasn't it?

Hildenbrand: Well, yes, but he was not an inexperienced person. He'd been [Mansfield](#)'s whip since '71, and before that he was secretary of their conference. So he'd been in the leadership for quite some time. But you're right, in that with Carter in the White House, it really was a test of his leadership. It would have been reflective on him had they lost.

Ritchie: Was the Panama Canal a good example of the way Byrd and Baker worked together?

Hildenbrand: That may be the only example of something that was meaningful that they worked together and were able to accomplish something. They got along, but they didn't get along and compromise the way Mansfield and Scott did, for example. I'm not so sure there was the same mutual respect. There was mutual respect, but I don't think it was as deep seated as Mansfield and Scott.

Mansfield and Scott were cut from the same cloth and they understood each other. Intellectually they were close. Baker was new, Byrd was new.

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Friendships and respect of that kind take a while, you can't do that overnight, and these two had been together less than two years at that time, in leadership posts.

Ritchie: The whole treaty almost came undone at the end when Dennis DeConcini offered his amendment.

Hildenbrand: But we knew, we had seen the amendment, it was not a surprise. It was one of the things we knew we were going to have to deal with. Everybody was prepared for it. If we didn't have the votes for that, then we didn't have the votes for the treaty anyway, so it wouldn't have made any difference.

Ritchie: So you don't think that that really changed the nature of the treaty?

Hildenbrand: I don't think so. I mean, what it did is it made the Baker-Byrd thing more saleable to the administration and to Torrijos. If you look at the lesser of the two evils, they lived a lot longer with Baker-Byrd than they could with [DeConcini](#). So I think it had the effect of at least strengthening the Baker-Byrd amendment.

Ritchie: The Panama Canal debate was also broadcast over the radio. How well do you think that experiment worked?

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Hildenbrand: I think it worked exceptionally well. I think it worked better than anybody even thought that it would. I don't think that anybody could visualize women in their kitchens preparing dinner listening to a debate on the Panama Canal. We in the Congress have a tendency to sort of look down our nose at constituents, at people, since we don't feel that they're as interested in the sophisticated things that we might be interested in. They have a tendency to think that they're interested in pocketbook issues, and war issues, but that they don't really get interested in things such as this. But anytime you have a conservative cause, whether it's a pro or a con, you're going to have a lot of interest -- because they drum up interest throughout the country with their causes, and opposition to this was a conservative cause. So there was a lot of interest.

Ritchie: Some commentators suggested that the debate lasted longer because it was broadcast.

Hildenbrand: I don't think that's true. Opponents of television in the Senate will lead you to that. They will believe that because they think television would lengthen the Senate sessions because everybody will want to get on television. I don't think that getting on radio played that big of a part in members' desire to go to the issues. It was a very complicated issue, and there was a lot of emotion on both sides: to give back or not to give back this

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canal, that conservatives would say we fought and bled and died for. And it was ours, that's what they've always contended.

Ritchie: Well, Baker went to the mat on the Panama Canal, which clearly meant a lot to Carter, even if he may not have been as directly involved in it. Then Carter vetoed

Hildenbrand: Clinch River.

Ritchie: which was Baker's pet project. Wasn't there any sense of his being owed something in return?

Hildenbrand: None whatsoever. Baker had a chance to go to China in either 1979 or '80, at Easter time, and had an airplane. He had been invited by the Chinese. At the last minute the Defense Department said, "We're sorry, but we need that aircraft for somebody else," and took it away from him. He had to call the Chinese, and say, "I'm very sorry, but I don't have any means to get there." They didn't feel they owed him anything.

Ritchie: But he opposed the SALT II treaty very vigorously, which probably helped to make sure it never came to a vote. They could never have passed it without his support, do you think?

Hildenbrand: Oh, I don't think they could have, no. But administrations have a tendency, like constituents to politicians, it's not what you've done for me, it's what have you done for me

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lately. That's the same thing. The fact that he did it when he did it doesn't make any difference. It's what did you do yesterday, or what are you going to do today. You know, the canal was never really Carter's. It wasn't an idea that started with him, it was something that had been around quite a while. So he did not feel that strongly about it. I would venture, and I don't know if it's to be a fact, but on the basis of the people who opposed the treaty, if Jimmy Carter had been in the Senate, he would have been opposed to the treaty. Philosophically, I think that's

probably right. But he was President of the United States, and it was a different ball game.

Ritchie: Whereas the SALT treaty was a Carter initiative.

Hildenbrand: Mmm-hmmm. And there again, it's difficult dealing with the foreign power such as Russia. It's hard to know what to believe and what not to believe. We still argue today the relative strengths of the two countries. My guess is we don't really know what they've got. My guess is we come close to it. But Carter never, I think, instilled in the people a feeling that he knew what the hell he was doing in the field of foreign affairs. Nixon was a consummate foreign policy person. He was a lousy domestic person, but he was very good in foreign policy. He really understood all of the countries and all of the leaders. He'd have been a hell of a Secretary of State. Carter, on the other hand, was good domestically, as Reagan is. But once you get outside the borders of Georgia,

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he didn't know very much about what was going on. That plays a little bit of a part, to think that somebody like that would initial a treaty like SALT II; They just didn't trust him. They weren't so sure that he wasn't giving away the store. And the verifiable part of it was very difficult. There was almost was no verifiable part of it. People just threw up their hands and said, what the hell, it's not worth the paper it's written on. We can't tell whether anybody's living by it.

Ritchie: Do you think that Baker's opposition to SALT helped to rebuild some of his bridges to the groups that opposed the Panama Canal treaties?

Hildenbrand: Oh, maybe, but they'll never forgive Howard Baker for the Panama Canal. If he lives to be whatever years he lives to be, he'll always be remembered as the person who turned the Republican party into supporting the Panama Canal, and is responsible for it carrying a Panama flag instead of a United States flag. They'll never forgive him. Conservatives have a very long memory, and don't forgive that often. It's hard to get back in their good graces, once you're out of them.

Ritchie: So you don't think that had any part in his calculations on which side to support on SALT?

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Hildenbrand: Oh, no. He never could get back in their good graces, and he knew that. You can't be wrong, even once, with them. You have to be one hundred percent. It's not "I'm an almost conservative." You've got to be one. He was smart

enough to know that there wasn't anything that he could possibly do to make him the darling of the conservatives. They had their darlings.

Ritchie: The worst failure in legislation that Carter seemed to have had was his energy bill. He must have given more national broadcasts on energy than any other issue, and the bill kept coming apart in Congress. Why did they have so much trouble getting an energy bill passed?

Hildenbrand: Basically, I think, because of its impact on everybody who travels. It's a difficult subject. There aren't very many people, certainly constituents, who know about oil wells and natural gas wells, and drilling, and oil depletion, and all of the things that go into an energy crisis. All they know is that there wasn't any heating oil in New England to keep people warm, and some thing had to be done about that. If you remember those summers with those long lines on gas rationing. It was a difficult time, but we got ourselves into that situation on our own, and I think what Carter was trying to do was to try to set the groundwork so that we would never get there again. We were so dependent upon foreign oil that if we couldn't drill oil, or find it ourselves, or get OPEC to let us

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have it, we had to find alternate sources of energy, whether it was gas or wind or whatever. Well, you know, that's difficult to sell to the American people, because they don't understand that, they're not used to that. They have gasoline that runs their cars and they have oil and coal that heats their house. You start to talk to them about gas and solar heat, they don't understand that. That doesn't mean anything to them. They're not that much of a pioneer, today's people, that they're going to go ahead and say, "Jesus, that's fine, let's go ahead and build solar panels on all of the houses, and let's do whatever it takes."

There was also a feeling against Big Oil. They blamed Big Oil for the crunch that they were in, because they felt that Big Oil was simply reaping major profits and they weren't really doing very much to help the oil storage facilities, unless it was worth their while. That's part of the [Abourezk-Metzenbaum](#) fight on natural gas. It was more an anti-corporate fight than it was a let's try to do something for the people to help our energy situation, our energy crisis.

Ritchie: Carter argued that Congress really wasn't equipped to handle a complex piece of legislation like energy, because they had to break it down into fifteen committees in the House and so many committees in Senate. That it couldn't be handled by one group. Is that a fair assessment?

Hildenbrand: It's a fair assessment if you're sitting at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. Civil rights bills could be as complex as anything else. Anti-trust provisions of laws could be complex. Complex bills are not something that Congress had not dealt with before. The fact that it went to as many committees as it went to doesn't certainly enhance its ability to pass. That's the same thing here -- when you get that many committees working on it you've got to wind up with a terrible piece of legislation. To some degree he's probably -- there's some validity. The less committees you have operating on a given piece of legislation, the easier and more simpler it is for everybody to understand it. But you get that many people involved in it and they all want to put a mark on it. That makes it difficult.

Ritchie: It was about that time they reorganized the committees, too.

Hildenbrand: In '77, [Stevenson-Brock](#). But this was now after '77 and Carter was still complaining that the committees were too fragmented. He wanted it to go to a single committee, one single committee. But there was no way the manner in which it was drafted did not infringe on the jurisdiction of other committees. And

committee chairmen are very, very jealous of their prerogatives, as well as the rules of the Senate, which spell out what those responsibilities are, those areas of jurisdiction.

Ritchie: Carter was always talking about comprehensive programs: we need a comprehensive program for this or that.

Hildenbrand: That's why it got referred to all those committees. If he had had a simple piece of legislation, it would have gone to a single committee. But if you draft a bill, and this is true even here in the Senate, the members of the Senate do that, they try to get too much in it, and then they fragment it, and it goes to committees that they don't want to have jurisdiction. So it's always best to draft a bill in the very simplest of forms so that you only deal with a single committee and it can't be re-referred and killed in some other committee. That's what he did with that: it was so complex, and it went so many places.

Ritchie: Did it leave itself more vulnerable to lobbying efforts against it?

Hildenbrand: Oh, it always does when you get that many people involved. The more you put in a bill, the more people can get involved in opposing it. The other side of the coin, I guess, is the more people can get involved in supporting it also.

But it always seemed to me that the simpler it was -- I guess it depends on where you

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are, what side of the issue you're on. You can see where you want to get as many people involved to help you, and then the other side of that is that if you get into that then you get that many people involved in opposing you. Maybe it's a Catch 22.

Ritchie: An issue like energy and oil, I imagine, brings out the big guns in lobbying?

Hildenbrand: Well, you know, those are the people that had the money to pay for the lobbyists. Big Oil always had good lobbyists, and always had the money to pay lobbyists. Through the years they have been very, very effective. Their home state senators certainly have taken care of the oil industry. They haven't really been that badly hurt, as compared to some of the other industries throughout the country. It's like agriculture: you've got to eat.

Ritchie: In general, what qualities would you say make a person an effective lobbyist?

Hildenbrand: The most effective lobbyists, I think, are those who understand the Congress of the United States, the way it operates, and the personalities of the individuals in the Congress. Secondly, he needs to know the issue for which he is lobbying. And I've said this to companies through my years of service in the Congress, that I would much rather you hire someone who knows the Congress and all of its little intricacies, and train them in your

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industry, whatever that is, than to hire somebody who is conversant with your industry and try to train them in Congress, because I don't think you can do that. Most of the good lobbyists are people whose history or background is the Hill. If you look at the lobbyists in Washington, Bill Timmons, Tom Korologos, Boggs' son, Tommy Boggs, all came off the Hill in some form. Tommy Boggs was raised by a mother and father [[Lindy](#) and [Hale Boggs](#)] that were in Congress. Korologos started as an aide to a senator and wound up at the White House. Timmons started as an aide to a Congressman and wound up at the White House. Some of the leading lobbyists for defense contractors are all off the Hill.

Ritchie: What is it that they know that somebody who wasn't on the Hill wouldn't know?

Hildenbrand: They have a feeling about this place. They understand that this is family, in the first instance. And they understand what makes this place go. They understand how senators themselves work with each other. They know personalities. They know that you can have somebody support something because of something that somebody did for them totally unrelated to what it is that you're working on. You have to know those personalities, you have to know who likes who, and who doesn't like who. You have to know that an individual senator has fifteen votes against him, just by saying his name. Those are things that you have to be up here to learn and to find out. You have to live with it in order to understand it.

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Ritchie: What kind of mistakes can a lobbyist make? What's the type of thing that a person who hasn't been up here might stumble on?

Hildenbrand: Oh, major mistakes I think that lobbyists make is to try to really pressure a member into voting for or against something, or to try to exert pressures, to be untruthful. Members hate to be lied to -- maybe that of all of the things. What you have to do, I think, to be a good lobbyist is to go in to a member and put all your cards on the table and be totally up front, say "This is where we're coming from, this is what it means, this is why we need your support." If you don't do that, you run the risk of making an enemy for life. While he may not help you on this issue, unless you're a single-issue lobbyist, he's going to be around to help you on others. I don't think there's any issue that is worth destroying your credibility with the Congress in order to get it accomplished, unless you're going to do this and quit, and never have to worry about it. But if you're going to be around, in order for you to be accepted among these members, you've got to be absolutely up front with them and absolutely truthful. They respect candor. Even thought they may not be with you, they respect the position that you've taken. Until you prove differently, they respect you.

Ritchie: Does a reputation spread beyond one office? Do members clue each other in about their relations with lobbyists?

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Hildenbrand: Oh, yes. Members will talk, particularly committee members on the same committee, dealing with the same issues. That's more apt to be true of somebody who's a bad penny than it is somebody good. Members are more apt to say, "Christ, stay away from whoever it is that's bad news," than they are to say, "Gee, I hope you see Harry, he's a hell of a nice guy and he's got a good story to tell." Members would be less apt to do that they would if it was a bad scene.

Ritchie: With the incredible increase in cost of campaigning, does this add a new pressure in terms of lobbying, that the lobbyists have campaign contributions they can make available to members?

Hildenbrand: Well, but it's within limits. You can only accept so much. Sure it plays a role. Lobbyists now have a tendency to go out and hold fund raisers for members in order to raise money. It's easier to do that than it is to try to come up with a contribution on your own. So members do that. But you have to first of all believe that the Congress is corrupt, in the first instance, to believe that a member's vote can be bought because you're going to raise money for him if he votes a certain way. I think you would be hard pressed to find any kind of an example where you can say that a member's vote was purchased by this lobbyist or that lobbyist, or this group or that group. Although after an election, journalists will write -- and

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you've seen the stories -- they got so much money from the medical profession, and they supported whatever it is. What they do is they draw a parallel between the vote that this person cast and the fact that he received a hundred thousand dollars from the medical community. Well, you can do that with every guy's that running, because he's voted on every issue there is, and anybody that gives him money I can draw the parallel that he voted that way because he got five thousand dollars contribution.

But that's a ridiculous way to treat campaigns, and certainly a way to treat members. You know, they're held in mostly disrespect anyway. I guess in a survey they're lower than garbage men. A lot of that is because newspapers and television continue to write those kind of stories. If you say that often enough, people that are listening to it, they're not sophisticated, they don't know what goes on here in Washington -- Washington's a foreign country to most of them. They like Dan Rather, and Dan Rather says "That's the way it is," and so they say, "Yeah, boy those guys are really doin' it." They don't have anymore idea whether they are or not than they can fly.

The news media sometimes doesn't accept the responsibility that it has, and sometimes is not as good in living up to that responsibility as maybe they should be. The fight now over Ted Turner and CBS, based on the fact that they think they're a liberal, pinko,

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whatever they think they are, and that all they hear is the bad side of things, well, the news media and television can be blamed for some of that. They have a tendency not to present the full story. They don't necessarily lie, but they leave

things out, because it's not quite sensational enough if you put it in. It's like the old story of a bad story in the newspaper. The people say, "Oh, well, we're going to retract it." Well, the story appeared on page one, and the retraction appeared on page thirty. It seems to me that journalism should accept the responsibility up front and not print that, or print it in its entirety and not print it and try to get away with it, and then if they don't get away with it retract it someplace else, because the retraction never catches up with the first story.

Ritchie: After the four years that Howard Baker was minority leader, he had gotten quite a national reputation as a leader against Carter's programs and holding the Republicans together on most issues. He announced his candidacy for president, but his campaign never got off the ground. He withdrew right after the New Hampshire primary. What happened?

Hildenbrand: Well, simplistically, two things happened. One, he's right when he says you cannot run for the presidency of the United States and have a full-time job, because running is a fulltime job. The second part was, he did not have good organization. They were neophytes in political campaigning at that level. Because

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they could not have all of his time, it was very difficult. That's really what happened. What he did as leader doesn't translate into very many votes. He managed to stave off some things, and he managed to pass some things, but those are not issues that the people are going to flock to the voting booth to support you, because you were a great leader. They could care less, as far as that's concerned. The only thing that got him was exposure on television, so that they knew who he was. But nobody ever said because you're such a great leader we want you to be our president.

And you have to remember that Reagan started from 1976, when he damn near beat Ford in the convention in Kansas City, that group stayed together. Everybody that ran was fighting an uphill battle to run against Ronald Reagan. Even if they could have beat him in some primaries they'd have gone into convention and they didn't have the delegates. He still had those delegates.

Ritchie: But being minority leader was even an additional burden in the sense that he had to be on the floor rather than out campaigning.

Hildenbrand: I don't think that you can run for the presidency of the United States and be in the leadership. Jack Kennedy did it because he left in January and never came back, when he was a senator from Massachusetts in 1960. Some of the great letters were written by Hugh Scott and [Ken Keating](#) in that period of time. They wrote

periodically, they wrote to Jack to tell him that they realized that he was very busy out there and that he didn't have time to come to Washington and do the things in the Senate that he should be doing. They didn't want him to totally not know what was going on, so they would write him letters and tell him that this is what we did today. It was like a little child who went to camp and wrote home to their mother and father and said what we did. Those letters are priceless. They wrote to Jack to tell him they knew that he wasn't coming back and couldn't be and we want you to know what we're doing. Everybody got a big kick out of them, including Jack, he thought they were funny and enjoyed them. They put them in the Record from time to time, whenever they wrote them.

But he left, and hell, he never came back until he got the nomination. Lyndon, on the other hand, was here, he was majority leader. He couldn't leave.

End of Interview #6