

THE SENATE IN THE 1950s
Interview #2
Thursday, December 16, 1982

RITCHIE: I'd like to start today by asked if you could describe what a senator's office was like in the early 1950s. How did Senator Gillette's office function? I know it had a relatively small staff.

MCCLURE: Relatively small is right. When I came aboard there was an executive secretary, Cy Farr; there was a case worker, an older lady, Betsy Lou Ross; and some secretaries, Dorothy Dalton, Eva Charlton, Chickie Chaikin, and Rose Ann Cosgrove. Some were temporaries. And Mark Gillette, the son, came in and out when he wasn't in school. But basically it was a very small group.

He was in 229 in the now Russell Building, on the west end, with a lovely view of the monument and the mall and all that. He had a glorious old fashioned office, as I have said, with a grand chandelier, marble fire place, big desk, easy chairs. It was a most comfortable kind of a room, high ceiling, big windows. The next room was a reception room, which speaks for itself. The back end of that they had partitioned off with a bookcase. Near the window Cy Farr had his desk. I guess there were a couple of girls out there in the front room. The other room was for the other typists and the case worker, and ultimately me, though at first I didn't sit there.

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The mail was consistent, except when there was a push by some lobbying group that would pile up thousands of duplicate letters that you didn't pay any attention to, except the volume of them. A great deal of case work, of course, all the veterans and social security people, the same thing that goes on today. I was amazed at that. I didn't realize how important senators were in handling personal cases for all kinds of people. Of course, businessmen, farmers, anybody who had business with the government had learned to go through a senator or a congressman's office for help. It expedites responses, for example, and clarifies mix-ups and errors and so on. Cy Farr ran the office. He had been with the senator before, and he was the expert on Iowa politics. Held been the campaign director three times, and knew every county leader and all the Democratic machinery in the state, plus a few people in all the organizations and so forth.

There was no legislative assistant. No office had one by that name in those days. Since the legislative load was no where near what it is today, a senator could pretty much handle it himself, at least the parts that he was greatly interested in, such as his committee work and major bills that he was going to have to take a stand on. He drafted the responses to inquiries about what his position would be on such-and-such an issue. There were no position papers produced by anybody. And he was able--the state wasn't terribly populous of course--to keep a personal correspondence going himself with several

thousands of people over the year. He dictated the

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the letters and he signed them. And if there were multiple responses required we of course used the mimeograph machine.

As time went on and I found my feet I became in effect the administrative assistant. I didn't administer anything, although that was the title. It being a new kind of job, many senators didn't know what to do with administrative assistants exactly. Some of them made their political guys from the state the top man, who came in with him with the election. That still occurs, I'm sure. Some of them were research and speech-writing guys, mostly like I was. Some actually administered the offices in the larger states. When they had larger numbers of staff they had to have somebody really actively operating as an administrator. Well, Cy Farr did the same for that little group we had.

Of course, committee work came first, and he was on Agriculture, and Rules, and Foreign Relations, and also he was on Small Business. The latter was a special committee formed about 1950, which had no legislative power but did a lot of investigating, held numerous hearings. He had a subcommittee there I believe. Anyway, that was his committee structure. On the Foreign Relations Committee he was chairman of the subcommittee on the Middle East, Near East, and South Asia. On Agriculture he had his subcommittee on the utilization of farm crops, which I have talked about. Naturally he served

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on other subcommittees in the various committees, of which he was not chairman. Foreign Relations at that time, and I suppose it's still the same, used its subcommittees really as consultative bodies; they had no legislative power or even jurisdiction, they had regional jurisdiction. They were used for consulting with the State Department generally, sometimes with other agencies, sometimes even with public organizations and private citizens. But I think Gillette found the system quite frustrating; in particular the case of the Near East subcommittee. During the time the CIA managed to get rid of Mossadegh in Iran, there was a great deal of shennanigans and mysterious business that the public couldn't find out about. We could read the papers but we never were getting anything publicly honest from the Department of State or the CIA or the oil companies. Gentlemen from the State Department would come up and ask for an executive session, which in those days meant a closed session. They'd tell the senators a great deal, no doubt, but after that the members were paralyzed; they couldn't speak without violating or revealing classified material. It was maddening, because senators knew what was going on or thought they did but couldn't talk about it, except to each other. Gillette never would tell me either. He'd just say, "No, I'm under an embargo, and we just have to go along this

way." The senators' staff was never permitted in those meetings. Pat Holt

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was in, of course, because he was on the committee staff, but senators' staff, never.

Nowadays, of course, with everything open, presumably, and every senator having a staff member through the Gravel resolution, there's not so much secrecy, really. I don't think they can control it in the way they used to. Of course, the Rules Committee had no secrets. They had executive sessions, but members' staff were permitted. Some of the matters were quite politically sensitive, but they didn't involve foreign policy or the safety of the Nation, Heaven knows. So I went to all the hearings, any meeting at which Gillette was either chairing or serving, and I went to all executive sessions that I was permitted to. It was a wonderful learning process. The ultimate being a conference with the House, which was the next-to-last stage in the great legislative process. Certainly no matter what the subject is, it's great theater. In fact, I regard the whole Senate as a theater and all the sub-plots, and side-play, and incidental music that goes on in the committees and hearings and press conferences and so on, is all very dramatic, I found. Wonderful theater and a wonderful cast of characters that changed in part every day. The steadies being the elected officials, staff, and press, with the public, the lobbyists, the visitors, the witnesses, and the tourists running in and out. You know what it's like, it's a great Grand Central Station milling through here, in the summer especially.

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Well, back to Gillette's office. We at some point decided we should put out a newsletter, a weekly four or five page newsletter to the papers and to the radio stations. Gillette, like all good politicians, was highly sensitive to changes in public opinion, and he wanted to stir up comment; through the use of a newsletter he could get people to respond to something he wrote--or I wrote for him. Well, that was quite a chore, because what I did was track everything he did and relate it to everything that seemed to be of importance to the people of the state and sometimes to the Nation as a whole. It was used. We'd appear especially in the little weekly papers who have no money for syndicated columnists; this was free and they would print his little picture, which he sent along. We had a masthead that they could use, which got to be a kind of logo all around the state. Dozens of them would print this. Then the radio stations would use parts of it when they wanted to. It was quite successful, I think. Didn't guarantee his reelection, but it certainly kept the people aware of what he was doing, and to some degree what was happening that was not to be found necessarily in the public press or the other media.

Also we developed, after the Senate had created this studio over in the Capitol for radio and then TV,

a weekly radio program, fifteen minutes I think, and then later television. That was more rare. This was just the beginning of TV, really; it was not as developed anywhere near as it is now. But if he had an important statement

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that he wanted immediate attention given to, and didn't want screened through editors and so forth, he would use the TV. Not too often, but once or twice a year. When he announced he was going to run again, that was obviously an occasion, but there were others involving treaties and things of public concern.

Of course there were a constant stream of Iowans coming through, whom he always wanted to greet, naturally. They often just wanted to drop in and say hello. Sometimes they had a problem they wanted solved, or an issue they wanted to discuss. Plus the usual stream of lobbyists and the press. We had some pretty good papers in Iowa at the time, the *Des Moines Register* especially. Not all of them had staff people here; they used stringers. And the A.P., U.P., I.N.S., at that time there were three press services. You never saw the TV commentators in those days. Radio types, sure, lots of radio reporters would come by.

We also had a press release system which was handed out here, and mailed sometimes to papers in the state--usually too late by the time it got there to be newsworthy. We had an old mimeograph machine down in the basement, which we all used. We would line up and run a hundred off, collate them, and staple them, and take them over to the gallery.

That reminds me, once I was assigned a major speech by the senator. He'd been talking in general, this was probably in '51, '52,

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about the inability really to describe to the American people what we were doing in the world. We had NATO, we had SEATO, we had the OAS, we were involved in numerous treaties and security arrangements with all kinds of countries, so he assigned me to find out from the State Department, as well as my own reading, three things: what are deemed to be America's vital interests in the world, where are they? Two, what measures have we taken, or will we take, should trouble arise, to defend these vital interests, as distinct from just interests that we have with every country; not military measures in the sense of preparedness, but what strategic arrangements are we involved in; that's the treaties and the executive agreements of all sorts. And of course, third, what resources do we have to fulfill our commitments, not just military but manpower, and economic resources, and available raw materials,

and everything that would go into a massive military, or defense build-up.

So I worked months on the damn thing. It was a very good thing for me; it was discipline, and I learned about what we were involved in. I really didn't know, or know enough about it. Anyway, after a period we had a huge, big speech, a good hour-and-a-half Senate speech, with maps and charts and everything. Well, he liked it, and we chose a quiet afternoon, had it all prepared in advance, of course. Well, I was so busy pulling together the last minute ravelings that any major undertaking required, I forgot to have the girl carry the text of the speech over to the press gallery. Well, you

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know while the guys in the gallery listen with some attention to a speech, they'd much prefer to have a written, printed text from which they can draw their own quotations. It wasn't till he was about half way through it that a word came from the gallery: "Where the hell is the text?" Hah! Well, we got a few over in time. They were sitting down at the mimeograph machine. Nobody had gone to get them! God, what a sensation that was. Course, it was such a learned and long piece it had no real news value anyway, although a new guy from the *New York Times* came around and said, "I'm keeping this as a reference work. I've got to cover all this stuff." And I guess it had some academic impact and so forth. But that dreadful last minute gaffe--I never let that happen again.

RITCHIE: There was no official press secretary in the office, did you

McCLURE: No, I was that, too. Anything with words I did. That was my strong point, I guess.

RITCHIE: Was the senator more oriented, would you say, toward the Iowa press than say trying to get national press, in the *Washington Post* or the *New York Times* or the wire services?

McCLURE: It depended on the subject. On foreign policy he wanted as much national coverage as he could get, in the New York and Washington papers, because he was trying to make an impact on the

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whole of public opinion. But for farm matters and various state concerns, he actively sought Iowa press attention.

RITCHIE: Did a senator in those days do more of his own press work than they do now? Was he

more the person who would actually deal with reporters?

MCCLURE: Oh, yes. Oh, absolutely. Well, I would take care of a routine visit of course, but if they wanted a statement from him, he'd have them in his office. And he'd have a press conference once in a while, when some subject came up that was worth having it about. Usually things growing out of disputes in the Subcommittee on Privileges and Elections over Joseph McCarthy and other sundry cases we handled. He was very good on his feet and spoke beautifully of course, and fielded questions with aplomb, I would say. I saw him get his foot in the pail one or two or three times, and I helped him out of it, but that happens to everybody. Misquoted, or used the wrong number, or something.

RITCHIE: What was the pace of life like in a Senate office in those days? Was it a busy, hectic schedule?

McCLURE: No. It would be at times, of course, especially if your man was doing something big or important or time-consuming. In the years before I came to the Senate and for several years afterward the day the Senate went out of session they might as well have closed

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the office, except as a mail drop and a phone answering service. Nothing! For months you didn't have a damn thing to do. Of course, I did do a lot of reading and preparing of material for the next session, and I think that went on in all offices, too, I'm sure it did. But generally speaking lobbying stopped, newspaper men didn't bother, there wasn't any news to get, and the senator wasn't in town. He headed for Cherokee. He did a tour of the state, or he maybe went abroad on a trip someplace. He loved his home town and his farm. He would just go back and become a farmer for three or four months.

But the Senate was totally dead. The sessions ended in August or early September. Once in a while as when the Korean War began they ran on later, very rarely. There just wasn't the volume of business there is now--the pressure of extending laws all the time, the reauthorizing programs all the time. There was new legislation, of course, but it seems to me that the volume just multiplied geometrically as time went on.

RITCHIE: The Senate staff as a whole was much smaller. Did you get to deal with the staff members of other senators and committees?

McCLURE: I tried to know every administrative assistant personally. I made it a point. There were 96 when I started, and then Alaska and Hawaii joined the Union and there were 100. I think I knew them all, and sometimes more; I mean their executive

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secretaries, or a girl in the office. I tried to have an access to every office and every committee to the degree I needed it. I hadn't much to do with several committees because we weren't involved in any way by them. We didn't have big military installations, so I didn't pay much attention to Armed Services. But Commerce, Labor, Public Works, Agriculture, of course, not Interior much, we don't have national parks or anything like that that would involve Interior. Then, of course, the Finance Committee, everyone had to keep his eye on that. I got to know the key people I think in all committees.

RITCHIE: I also noticed in the Secretary's Report that every once in a while Mark Gillette's name would appear, and Rose Gillette was also on the staff for a while.

McCLURE: Yes.

RITCHIE: What did they do on the staff? And was it common for senators' wives and children to work in their offices?

McCLURE: It wasn't common, but it occurred. John Sparkman's wife used to be around the office a great deal. And there may have been others I didn't know about. Well, they pitched in and did jobs that needed to be done that might not have been done so quickly if we'd depended on this small staff. Mark could be a runner, and he could type a bit, and be generally useful. Mrs. Gillette knew large

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numbers of people in Iowa herself, so she was a good person to have when a delegation was coming in. She knew the wives.

Well, they may have needed to supplement their income, too. The pay wasn't very good, you know, for a long, long time. Senators' pay was miserable, and therefore, everybody else's was. Of course, he had a little income from his farm; I didn't know how much. But he was not wealthy by any means. I told you the story about him being on the best-dressed list in America for two suits. What a farce! They lived in an apartment here, usually, and drove a big, big car, because traveling across the wide open spaces of Iowa you've got to have a big Chrysler or big Buick or something. I drove all those roads during the campaign, and I was glad to have a nice, big bus to move. He never went less than 80 when he could get on the open road. "Come on, Mac, step on it! We've got to get going!"

RITCHIE: Was he more likely to drive back and forth to Iowa?

McCLURE: Yes, oh, yes. They drove all the time. Well, I guess if he went out for a speech or something he flew, but if it was between sessions, sure, and even for a long vacation time. They sometimes had recesses around Easter and so on.

RITCHIE: You mentioned about the campaign. What did you do during the '54 campaign? And was it usual for the Washington staff to get involved in the home state campaign?

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McCLURE: Oh, it certainly was usual.

RITCHIE: The executive secretary had been his campaign director.

McCLURE: Yes.

RITCHIE: Was everybody else involved?

McCLURE: The whole gang went out. Well, no, not the whole gang. Two girls, Chickie and Rose Ann, and Cy and I. What did I do? It was a mad scramble, because he told me when I was hired that he didn't intend to run again and I should not feel any constraints. If I thought he should do something that was worth doing, that fitted in with his thinking, I should propose it, even though it might have ramifications in Iowa that were not particularly conducive to support in the coming election. So he was involved in the Atlantic Union committee, and in this consumer thing, which few in Iowa could understand very well, I'm afraid, and involving himself in various investigations and studies, and actions on the floor, amendments and bills and so forth, which, had he been scrupulously examining the horizon for six years or five or four hence, he might not have done.

Well, come January of '54, he said, "Mac, I'm going to run again." Jeez! "Fix up a TV appearance over in the studio for tomorrow afternoon. I've prepared a little statement here. You want

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to look at it?" So that was it. Off we went, with really only nine months to do it in. No campaign organization, no real firm alliances except through the party, that were pro forma in many cases. He

didn't know a lot of the county chairmen because he hadn't been around the state a lot as much as he had in the past. No campaign literature, nothing, not even enough photographs. I whipped together a brochure with a beautiful picture of him and had a nice printing job done, several thousand printed. Then the campaign pictures. Then we began slowly lining up campaign trips to hit all the major towns, and the major organizations that might be meeting when he could get out there, and press conferences, radio and TV appearances, and the whole business of traveling.

Fortunately, a young man showed up, after we got to Iowa, after the session, I guess this would probably be September, who had a private plane. He said, "I want to help you senator, but I haven't got any money. What I'll do is fly you to all your speaking engagements." Gillette said, "That will be marvelous, but I will pay for the gas." OK, so that's the way we did it. It was a great boon, because driving 150 or so miles in time to get someplace for lunch and back again in the late afternoon was a grind. And then he lost all that time on the road, he couldn't be doing anything except sitting. So we used that plane a lot. We hit all the places, and the party performed. I mean they got crowds out and luncheons together at the Kiwanis Club and church meetings and all the usual

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places where candidates meet voters. I handled all the press releases, and we had one a day--had to--either asserting something or challenging something that had been said by somebody else, rebutting. It wasn't unlike any other campaign.

We raised a good deal of money for Iowa. I've forgotten now how much. One contribution that kicked back very hard came from the United Automobile Workers. They had a policy in those days, I think the amount was a thousand dollars. They sent us a list of one thousand members of the U.A.W. who each had given a dollar. But they unfortunately sent it through what was called Solidarity House, which was union headquarters in Detroit. Well, Solidarity, you'll recall, sounds sort of left wing; "Solidarity Forever," was a revolutionary song of the '20s, I guess. Well, the Republican press hit on that: "Gillette Gets Thousand Dollars From Solidarity House." No mention of the U.A.W.; it sounded like some socialist plot. They hit us hard with that. Of course, rebuttals and explanations never catch up. And they did it just over the weekend as the campaign was coming to a close.

Several unions gave about a thousand dollars each, the Railroad Brotherhoods here in Washington, but it took them almost to the end of the campaign to get the check to us. We'd committed ourselves on several TV shows and desperately needed the money. It finally came through. The Steel Workers; at that time the Packing House workers

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had been infiltrated by the Communists and they were a hot potato to handle. The members weren't Communist, but the union leaders were. We had to be very careful not to be endorsed in any way by them because the McCarthy spirit was very widespread in the Middle West, as we found to our unhappiness on election day.

One of the last days of the campaign we were driving back from someplace, Omaha I guess (we'd been down to do a TV program beamed into Council Bluffs and southwest Iowa from the Omaha station), when Rose Gillette said, "Guy, how's it going to go?" He said, "Well, I'm going to win by 35,000 or lose by 35,000." He lost by 35,000. Anyway, we got back in the office, and he said, "Mac, we've got a lot of this money left here, I want to send it back, proportionately." I never heard of such a thing. We spent, it must have been two or three days, we spent a lot of time divvying it up. I don't remember what it was, several thousand dollars, and we returned it in proportion with the contribution, and off it went. He ended up with no campaign contributions to be worrying about afterward. A man of great probity. Gestures like that were never publicized. Nobody knew it except those who got their checks back. But he knew it.

RITCHIE: You've attributed a lot of his defeat to McCarthy.

McCLURE: Not a lot. But it was a key point.

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RITCHIE: The fact that he was the chairman of the subcommittee that was dealing with McCarthy's involvement in the Tydings-Butler race. What were Gillette's own feelings about McCarthy and the whole anti-Communist movement?

MCCLURE: Oh, well, Gillette despised him, because not only didn't he like McCarthy's political methods but because he was an absolute stinker as a senator. Everybody says what a nice guy he was and a big back slapper and so forth, but his treatment of other senators was just vicious. He would send off a telegram to the press and then release it to Gillette ten hours after it had been distributed, blasting him for working in cahoots with the Democratic National Committee and that sort of thing, and then come bursting up on the floor, all hail-fellow-well-met. Gillette would never shake his hand.

After that instance I think I mentioned, when Carl Hayden had to move to discharge the Rules Committee of the Benton Resolution on McCarthy, and the Senate promptly refused to do it, therefore

giving the investigation a backward way of proceeding legally, McCarthy came over and tried to throw his arm around Gillette's shoulders, saying "No hard feelings, Guy." Well, Guy had them, he had plenty of hard feelings. He loathed him. Gillette refused even to turn his head. Furthermore, held never had to deal with such a brute around here, you know, such a crude, loud, and unscrupulous slimy character.

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Senators weren't like that when he started out here; they were gentlemen. And this was no gentleman.

RITCHIE: Do you think that the whole gentleman's club approach to other senators, not attacking each other personally all the rest of it, actually allowed someone like McCarthy to get away with as much as he did?

MCCLURE: I hadn't thought of it in exactly those terms.

RITCHIE: People like Gillette seemed to refrain from attacking him.

MCCLURE: Oh, they just turned their back on him. The only time I ever heard a really personal crack at McCarthy was by Senator William Fulbright. It was just at the time when the senator from Vermont . . .

RITCHIE: Ralph Flanders.

MCCLURE: Flanders and Fulbright had resolutions of condemnation before the Senate, and McCarthy rose and made some slashing attack on Herbert Lehman, I've forgotten just what it was, it's in the *Congressional Record* I know, and then left the floor. Fulbright got up and said, "I'm sorry the senator has left the floor, because we have just

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had a demonstration of what these resolutions are all about!" He drew the lesson for everybody there; we didn't need it, but he did it.

RITCHIE: Well, the Senate certainly took its time in acting.

MCCLURE: Oh, it took forever and ever. They were scared of him. He let word out that he was

having all senators' staffs investigated for secret Communist leanings, that sort of stuff. The place was awful; suspicion and almost terror was reigning around here. Here had a gang of goons doing his gumshoeing all over the place, stopping at nothing, stealing documents and breaking in doors and anything they could think of. It was just awful.

RITCHIE: You mentioned earlier that there was a story about a woman who suspected a break-in. What was the story behind that?

MCCLURE: Well, it was during the Butler investigation, the Maryland election. Grace Johnson was the clerk of the Rules Committee and an old pro, had been here many years, knew her job. One night she was working late, seven o'clock I think; she locked the door and was typing or whatever, when she heard a rattling at the door. Someone was trying to break in. So she called the Capitol Police, who took their time coming. They came and there wasn't anybody there of course. So she asked the policeman to get her some supper, which he did, and she spent the night. And a couple of times

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there were attempts to get in. She would turn on the light and begin typing and pick up the phone, and it would stop. But whoever it was was trying to get hold of the documents involving this case in Maryland. No other thing would have been worth trying to steal. Plus minutes of the executive meetings and anything else, I suppose, that he could lay his hands on. But he didn't get in; she was a brave girl.

RITCHIE: So Gillette's last act as a senator was to vote for McCarthy's censure.

MCCLURE: That's right, and that may be the time to more or less wrap up my time with Senator Gillette. The very fact that the Senate had to return for a special session to deal with the Watkins Committee resolution on McCarthy provided something that I'd otherwise not have had: access to all senators' offices, because I too had been unseated and would not have a job after January 3 of the coming year.

It was during that time that I made many efforts in trying to see various senators, but the successful one was Lister Hill, who was inheriting the chairmanship of the Senate Labor Committee. The ranking Democrat in the 83rd Congress was James Murray of Montana, who was also the ranking Democrat on Interior. He had been running in that same '54 election, and had promised his people in Montana that he would take chairmanship of the Interior Committee, which would

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handle more matters of importance to Montana than does the Labor Committee. So that meant Senator Hill, who stood second behind Murray, inherited the chairmanship. Held been on the committee from the beginning, I think from the beginning, I think since he came to the Senate in '38, but had not yet reached the top.

Well, he had no staff member on the committee. Senators didn't in those days. The chairman had his own man, of course, or two, and the minority member had his one or two staff, and then there were a few professionals who stayed around all the time. So it was obvious that he needed a staff director, or chief clerk as the technical title is, and cast about. I know for sure that most of the weight that determined him to select me came from his administrative assistant, Charles Brewton. Charlie and I worked together during that Tidelands battle. He had more or less been the back-behind-the-scenes organizer of the caucus and the inventory of the oil-for-education amendment, which I think I told you was used as a device to forestall complete loss of the Continental Shelf. I had done much of the public relations and speech work and radio connections and so on for that group. Charlie had been impressed with the job, and we'd won, in a sense. While I had not met Senator Hill in any formal way, I'd been around him a bit during all that struggle, and he had enormous respect for Guy Gillette, too, who of course was very strong in my corner. So on Christmas Eve Charlie got a phone call from Montgomery, Alabama: "Tell Stewart to show up on

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January 1st, or whatever day he's free." Wow, it was a great day, a great Christmas!

So then I became Senator Hill's chief clerk. I was first given the title of staff director. Well, the staff of the committee at the time was as small as the staff of an office at the time, this was 1955. We had fourteen people on the staff, four of them on the minority side and ten on the majority side. There were three majority professionals. I considered myself one, because somebody had to handle a lot of legislation if the other two gentlemen couldn't. Jack Forsythe was the general counsel, and William Reidy was the health man, and all the other legislation we divvied up among us. Jack was good on labor matters and had had experience with the House Committee on education matters. Those were the three big fields, but we had veterans' legislation, juvenile delinquency, arts and humanities, mine safety, an unbelievable list of stuff under the rubric of public welfare. God, if they couldn't think of where else to send it they sent it to the Labor Committee! The Committee was I think then thirteen, we had a one-vote majority, seven to six. One of the minority was a liberal Republican, [Irving] Ives.

Ives left, retired I guess. He was very ill and died shortly thereafter; very nice man. So on liberal-conservative splits we would lose [Strom] Thurmond, who was then technically a Democrat, and pick

up Ives, and sometimes a moderate like H. Alexander Smith,

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though he was a professional Republican, God knows, an Eisenhower supporter and finance chairman in New Jersey, I think, but a decent old man. We had some incredible people on that committee at various times. And it was great theater. Paul Douglas was aboard. [Hubert] Humphrey had gotten off, unfortunately, just before I came on. I would have loved to have worked with Humphrey. [Wayne] Morse was on the committee; later on [Joseph] Clark, [Jennings] Randolph, [Walter] Mondale, well the list is quite considerable.

RITCHIE: John Kennedy was on the committee, too.

MCCLURE: Jack Kennedy was there. He was the last Democrat, well, Thurmond was a so-called Democrat. Yes, Jack was the chairman of the Railroad Retirement Subcommittee--and hated it. What is there to do there? Well, he probably wished he still had it when he took on the Labor Subcommittee with Landrum-Griffin a few years later, which was a real buzz-saw. Out of which he made some capital, I think, but it was a tough one. Yes, we had quite a committee. Oh, we had Matt Neely of West Virginia.

RITCHIE: You had Barry Goldwater.

MCCLURE: No, not quite that early, I think. I'll have to look at the list. It changed every two years to some degree. Douglas left and went to Finance, which was very sad. He was an extremely able senator and we needed him because of his broad economic

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background. A lot of the material we were dealing with affected economics and nobody really was as qualified to deal with it as he was. And then Thurmond left us, unfortunately, in due course, and became a Republican.

But to go back to the staff, when Thurmond was assigned he was given the Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee. And he stormed right in to Senator Hill and said, "I gotta have staff!" This was the first break-through. Other senators had mumbled and muttered, but nobody had gotten anything yet. Well, Senator Hill knew he had to keep Thurmond more or less happy, if he could, because he was going to

be a key figure at times. So he gave in and we hired a chap from South Carolina, named Fred Blackwell. I don't think Thurmond knew what he was getting, because he called up a law firm in Columbia and they'd recommended Blackwell. We were wondering who he'd be, because he'd be sitting with us and working on the staff. So Jack Forsythe and I took him to lunch over at Mike Palm's the first day, and his first question was, "How's the minimum wage law doing?" Hah! It was up that year for extension or an increase, from a dollar to a dollar and a quarter, I think. That was his first interest! Well, he did his job for Thurmond, and damn well, he was a good lawyer. But his politics were as far removed from those of Thurmond as mine.

He was a fine addition to the staff. It was he who cooked up the "Peacetime G.I. Bill" as it was called. He got Thurmond to

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introduce it, which was pretty strange. It never went anywhere while Thurmond was there, but [Ralph] Yarborough then came in and made it his major political action up here, and ultimately succeeded. He hammered and hammered and hammered, and finally it went through, especially as the Vietnam casualty lists began coming in. Well, that's another long story.

But we did expand, and then once or twice we took on consultants, either lent to us by the Labor Department or paid for by the committee, on technical things. One guy came I think from the Labor Department, his question was the economic impact of increasing the wage and how much unemployment would increase, and how many small businesses would be driven to the wall, and all that Republican questioning that was going on. He'd been down in the Department for years and knew all the figures and could get more if we needed them. So it stayed pretty tight for many years. We had the offices where the present parliamentarian sits.

RITCHIE: In the Capitol Building?

MCCLURE: In the Capitol, which was very nice. Five seconds and you were on the floor, if you had to be. I had an office with no window, it was the second one in. But that was all right, I had a separate door I could escape through. The committee room was a handsome room, with the usual chandelier and fireplace. And then a third room, which is where the Executive clerk now sits, was in the back

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where there was one window near the ceiling looking out on a court, or an inset from the West Front, a pretty gloomy place, too. But so central and easy to operate from. The Secretary of the Senate and the Library of the Senate and everything was right near by. Well, you work over there, you know how convenient it is.

RITCHIE: Was there a hearing room nearby?

MCCLURE: We had the Old Supreme Court Chamber.

RITCHIE: Was that permanently assigned to you?

MCCLURE: Yes. What a room! Not the way it looks now. This was before they restored it. It had been the Senate till they build the new Senate wing.

RITCHIE: In 1859.

MCCLURE: Right, and then it was the Supreme Court, until they built the new Court building.

RITCHIE: In 1935.

MCCLURE: The Court was first below, in that beautiful room just beneath the old Senate chamber. They then used the upstairs room, on the second floor until '35. It was at Lister Hill's instance that an effort to turn it into what it had originally been was made by John Stennis, who was then chairman of the Legislative Appropriations

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Subcommittee. He was proposing to restore it into what it had been when the Supreme Court sat there. I went to Lister Hill and said something to the effect that "I think that's a bad mistake. The Supreme Court isn't in very good order at this moment in the South, and furthermore that's where the Senate met, and where Henry Clay and Daniel Webster and John C. Calhoun, and John Randolph, and Stephen Douglas and all the great senators of the early nineteenth century made their great speeches." Well, he thought I was right and went to Stennis and they revised the scheme to go back and make the chamber into what it had been and what it is today. Boy, it is beautiful! I stopped in there just a day or two ago.

It wasn't as beautiful as that when we had it, but it was great. Except it was drafty. Lister Hill didn't like cold drafts and there was something coming out of the ceiling, I think it was the air conditioning.

"Stewart will you get this place warmed up!" What could I do? We'd have an engineer up and he'd

tinker, but it never worked. But it was a good hearing room because it had a long dais, where the nine justices had sat, and it had a back room behind where we finally set up a couple of staff people, because we had no more office space. That's where we put Fred Blackwell and his secretary. But in that old room we had all our hearings and all our executive sessions. Once in a while it would be taken away from us for an official banquet given by the president of the Senate or the Foreign Relations Committee or something.

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RITCHIE: So the staff members in those days worked for everyone? They didn't divide it up so that one staff member worked for each subcommittee? Or how did they divide it up?

MCCLURE: Well, in effect, both. We had a subcommittee on health which Bill Reidy handled as the staff man. We had a subcommittee on labor but we didn't have a staff man for it, except from time to time a consultant. Forsythe handled that. We had a subcommittee on education, which he also handled. We had a subcommittee on veteran's affairs, which prior to Fred I had handled. Railroad retirement, and one or two little special ones, juvenile delinquency, and arts, which I would handle. For a long time there wasn't much to it really; there were a few hearings and then the bills would die. Well, we got a juvenile delinquency bill finally, and many, many years later the arts and humanities legislation.

RITCHIE: How would the members of the committee, particularly the subcommittee chairmen, make use of the permanent staff?

MCCLURE: Well, the chairman of the education subcommittee was Senator Murray, and he was, I'm afraid, in his dotage about the time I met him. Lovely gentleman, but he was quite senile. He had perfect memory of everything that took place under Franklin D. Roosevelt, but not as much more recent. His son, Charlie Murray, who was on his personal staff as administrative assistant, really was the senator, in effect, for the last several years. Bill Reidy had

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worked for Senator Murray, so Murray had both his son and Bill as well as Forsythe to deal with if he had to put his mind to doing something in the Education Subcommittee. And the other chairmen would just--I'd show up if it was my domain, and say, "Here I am senator, anything you want done, let me know." And that's the way it would work. Nobody insisted on having his own staff man. Later on they did, God knows, as the ballooning began. When I left there were a hundred and fourteen!

RITCHIE: I also noticed in the directories they did list the minority counsel for that committee, whereas a lot of other committees didn't list any minority staff people. And the minority in some committees didn't get staff assistance until the 1970s.

MCCLURE: I know. We always had them.

RITCHIE: Was it exclusive that the minority staff worked for the minority and the rest of the staff worked for the majority?

MCCLURE: Yes.

RITCHIE: And there was no cross-over?

MCCLURE: Oh, there could be, of course, if there were senators from both sides working on a common project. Sure there would be collaboration. The minority had a staff room up on the third floor of the Senate wing, beautiful big room. There were four of them, the

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general counsel, the minority staff director, and two girls. Then when the Democrats were in the minority--before my time fortunately, and after--we, the Democrats went upstairs and cut back to four. But there was just one such occurrence in the 83rd. During the time I was on the committee we were never in the minority. I wouldn't allow it!

RITCHIE: In 1955 Senator Hill made the Salk vaccine one of his big issues.

MCCLURE: Yes, he did.

RITCHIE: Free vaccines to all children, and the Eisenhower administration said no, that would be "socialized medicine"

MCCLURE: Oveta Culp Hobby didn't like it. We burned her.

RITCHIE: Well, how did he mobilize the staff for a big issue like that?

MCCLURE: Bill Reidy.

RITCHIE: It would just be one person?

MCCLURE: Well, he handled the substance. I managed the hearings, in a technical, physical pulling together. I think Bill chose most of the witnesses, and so did the senator. He knew whom he wanted. Lister Hill loved doctors, and he loved to have a witness

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whom he could call "Doctor." There were always doctors in the audience and on the witness list.

RITCHIE: So part of your job was getting the witnesses together?

MCCLURE: Well, in this case, since it was the chairman's special field, and Bill Reidy was the expert, I didn't select any witnesses, or even suggest any. I would handle the invitations, you know. In those days we had a private reporting firm, Ward and Paul. They had to be called, and by God they better be there at the right moment, and sometimes they weren't--and it was hell. And the usual copies of the statements that had to be collected in advance and distributed to members and all the usual managerial details of running a hearing, but the substance was handled by Bill and the chairman. Now, another bill, which we'll go into another time, the National Defense Education Act, I had a hell of a lot to do with.

RITCHIE: Did you handle publicity for the Labor Committee?

MCCLURE: We didn't have any.

RITCHIE: Didn't have any?

MCCLURE: No, there were no releases.

RITCHIE: I guess the press paid attention no matter what.

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MCCLURE: Well that, or the chairman would come out of the meeting and tell them what happened. Or the minority spokesman would tell them their version, which was perfectly all right. And sometimes they'd stand together and corroborate each other's statements.

RITCHIE: You certainly came out on top in the debate over the Salk vaccine. Reading back over that it made Mrs. Hobby and the Eisenhower administration look like Scrooge.

"Stewart E. McClure: Chief Clerk, Senate Committee on Labor, Education, and Public Welfare (1949-1973)," Oral History Interviews, Senate Historical Office, Washington, D.C.

MCCLURE: Not only that, but the next year we passed a general vaccine bill for the major children's diseases. No problem then. No, they didn't want that fight again!

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End of Interview #2