

WITH LISTER HILL ON THE LABOR COMMITTEE

Interview #3

Tuesday, January 11, 1983

RITCHIE: I'd like to start with a focus on Lister Hill, who does not fit the stereotype of a Southern Democrat in the 1950s.

MCCLURE: Hardly.

RITCHIE: How do you explain somebody like Lister Hill?

MCCLURE: Oh, well now, that's not going to be easy. He was a very complicated man, as any big public figure has to be. He can't be a monotonous, single-level person. He also was extremely intelligent and had a good education and had read a great deal. His horizons were far wider than those of the typical Southerner, or even typical American. You have no doubt read his biographical material so I won't go into all that, but as a result of his early education and legal training he drifted toward politics. He became a member of the Montgomery city school board. There's an interesting background to that, I understand, though none of these facts I can vouch for personally. This was about 1918, after the first World War.

His mother was a Catholic; I don't think he went to parochial school but he was in the church. And it was decided that that wasn't a very favorable public aspect to have in the days when the Klan was

page 74

reviving and anti-Catholicism was almost as strong as anti-blackism in the South. So he changed his religion, or publicly identified with whatever his father had been, Protestant of some sort. I don't know which sect. But his great-grandfather, who came from North Carolina, was a preacher. There were preachers in the family all along, though Lister's father was a doctor, surgeon. But anyway, in order to present himself to the hard shelled people of Montgomery for the school board he became a Protestant, though I don't think he practiced religion very vigorously. It was a political gesture, I think, basically.

He had also once wanted to be a doctor. He enormously admired his father, who was the first open-heart surgeon. He picked up a black boy who had been stabbed in the heart and sewed him up--remarkable first operation of that kind anywhere in the world I guess. The father named Lister Hill after Joseph Lister, the great English doctor (not the father of Listerine!). Hill is named Joseph Lister Hill, but he never used Joseph. He could have taken a medical education, but he went to watch his father perform a rather bloody operation one time and it so shocked him--he was a young boy or a

young man--that it just turned him off completely. He could have become some other kind of a doctor than a surgeon, but he didn't. He became a lawyer--he never practiced law either, to my knowledge, even briefly. He was in the war as a captain of infantry and pretty soon after the war went on the school board. Then came to Congress, very

page 75

early, '23 or '24, meaning when he left in '68 he'd been here forty-five years, which is a very long term. I guess Carl Hayden had a longer one.

RITCHIE: About fifty years.

MCCLURE: Yes, but I don't know of anybody else who has that much, House and Senate. So you have an educated man from a professional family, with great intelligence and breadth of vision. He wasn't cut in the mold of the typical red-neck Southern congressman or even senator. He married well, into a very distinguished family.

In the days when his great-grandfather came to Montgomery, the way a small city or town would engage the services of a preacher was to give him land, and they gave the Hill family a big parcel of land in now what is the heart of downtown Montgomery. So they had a large amount of money forever, and a solid investment in land. He never lacked for money. In fact, he never raised campaign funds until the campaign got so terribly expensive later on that he did have to go outside his own resources. So there again he's in the aristocracy, so to speak, to the extent there is any in this country: good family, large fortune, fine background, everything. Nothing in his early life would have made him anything other than what he became: respected citizen, veteran, everything, couldn't miss. Of course, I didn't know him in the House. I didn't know him even in the Senate

page 76

until 1955. By then held been there since '38 and he was one of the top powers in the body.

His real interest in legislation, other than things for Alabama, and TVA, and changing the basing point in steel pricing and that sort of thing, was education: vocational education and any other kind of education. And just about the time he was to inherit the Labor Committee, which handled all the legislation

affecting education, the *Brown* decision came down and the segregationists went mad. George Wallace wasn't governor, but the mood in Alabama was that it was no time for the federal government to put its fingers into public education. He was driven off of it, except for the NDEA, which was wrapped in the flag and safe. That's why he turned to health--well, he was also interested in it, of course. His father brought him up in a medical atmosphere. But it did afford him a vast field of action that supplanted what he would have preferred, I think, the field of education.

But whatever he was doing he was using the full capacities of his mind, to apply them to a big public problem. He was a senator who took his papers home. He read bills and amendments and reports, and when he went to the floor of the Senate as the manager of a bill he knew everything that was in that bill, every question that could possibly be asked and what the answers were. He had enormous pride in his own intellectual capacity, his enlightenment, his expertise,

page 77

and to be caught without knowing the answers was unthinkable. He'd grill the staff at meetings before we went to the floor till he knew *everything* that they knew, and probably even more, too, because he was in touch with all sorts of other people, lobbyists and influential people in the health field. He was friends with all the great doctors.

One of his great colleagues outside the Senate was Mary Lasker, of whom you may have heard. They were friends and political allies. She gave her political money with a cold-blooded eye to results, especially in raising money for the newly growing National Institutes of Health, with which Lister was greatly involved. She'd give money provided the man would say "Yes, I'll vote for any appropriations possible for the NIH." Well, that brought her close to Lister Hill and he could use her influence to assist him in his operations.

He was an extremely skillful legislator. I suspect, without having full knowledge about everybody who served here, that he probably is the greatest single legislator of this century, in terms of volume, in terms of impact, in terms of breadth of interest, and in terms of skill in creating laws. It's hard to create a law. It can take years to enact a new idea. He used to say to me after some meeting where we've made one step, adopted one amendment, or even gotten a quorum, "Well, Stewart, we're on our way!" He *loved* it, the

page 78

process, another step up that ladder. He just got a tremendous thrill out of effecting a change in this place; it's not easy.

He was so skillful in selecting his allies. The famous Hill Burton act, for instance, Hospital Survey and Construction Act. Senator [Harold] Burton, Republican of Ohio, had nothing to do with that bill. In fact, when it was on its way through Congress he went to the Supreme Court. But Hill wanted a Republican name on there, and this was a good one; he was a decent fellow and willing to go along. Later he played the same games with Styles Bridges, and Bridges, of course, was presumably a starch, rigid, conservative Republican. But Hill got him to go on to several big health bills, chronic disease and I've forgotten what else, they're all mentioned in the *Record*.

Like so many good senators, capable senators, he touched all the bases. Before any meeting of a subcommittee or committee he knew where everybody was going to stand on everything. He talked to them on the phone. The meetings may as well not have been held, in a sense, not that they voted on the phone, but the consensus grew and he knew where he was going to land up, and where the pits were and the barricades that had to be surmounted. He had an extraordinarily good intelligence system--staff, other senators, other committee people he'd known for years in the House, and everywhere else plus downtown, HEW. He had extremely good relations with all the

page 79

middle-level bureaucrats who run the programs, the legislative representatives, and so forth.

So he navigated through these choppy waters with great skill and never went aground, never lost. Sometimes he couldn't get a thing through when he wanted to, but that was just because the time wasn't ripe and he hadn't marshaled enough strength, but in the end he won them all. I think he was the greatest legislator, and to me, what an opportunity. I'd been here six years by then but still--working for Senator Gillette was a peripheral thing. Here I was in the heart of the purpose of this institution, passing laws, under the tutorial direction of the greatest of them all. It was a total education. Every time something happened, a new door was opened. Managing the committee, of course, was part of it.

He knew the biographies of every member of the Senate, to the degree he needed to. He knew *everything* about the members of the committee before they even got here. I remember making a fool of myself once when Senator [Claiborne] Pell had just come aboard the committee in '58 I think it was. I jocularly said to Senator Hill, "Well, you've got another Southerner from Rhode Island." And he said, "Oh, you mean Claiborne's Louisiana connections. I know all about that. " Of course he did. And Joe

Clark's Louisiana connections. He had them all. It was just remarkable. He kept that big volume of the annotated biographies of members right behind his desk

page 80

and would pull it down, "When did he get here?" Just had them all fixed in place with relation to him and each other. He was great, too, because he loved what he was doing. He didn't want to go home, or go to Europe, or go back to politick. He wanted to pass laws. This was his heaven on earth.

RITCHIE: Was he a particularly demanding person to work for?

MCCLURE: Oh, boy! I never worked for a tougher boss. I don't mean he was brutal or anything like that, he was hardly that, but demanding isn't the word for it. I used to write statements and sometimes speeches, as everybody does around here. I remember the first two or three, he kept them for weeks and sent them back all scribbled on: "What do you mean?" and "Where did you get that fact?" Or held call me in and we'd have to go over it; but he used them anyway. Finally I discovered the trick. He was afraid that I had just dictated these speeches to my secretary and never reread them afterwards. That must have happened to him, as it does to many; he was getting fresh copy, and the author, the ghost, hasn't even read the final script, and the senator is going to get up and read it. So I would go through the finished copy with a pen or pencil and make changes, which signaled him that, yes, I'd been over it, and reassured him that at least the ghost knew what he was saying.

Then, of course, as to being demanding, this whole business of preparing to go to the floor, or even to a committee meeting, the

page 81

staff all had to know everything that was going to happen if they could find it out and give him the answers. He had small patience with fools, I would say, but he didn't show it. He was a great gentleman.

RITCHIE: You said once at lunch that things changed when you moved from the Capitol to the Dirksen Building, that he was now in the office right next door to you.

MCCLURE: Yes, I was about as far from him sitting at my desk as I am from the door to your office over there on the corridor. He had a system of phones. He'd lift one and it would ring on my desk, Jack Forsythe's desk, and the health guy's desk, Bill Reidy and later Bob Barkley. We'd all grab it: "Yes, sir!" And he'd say whoever he wanted to talk to or all of us. "Stewart, come in here!" He was deep South, but he didn't have a drawl. He had a clipped accent. It wasn't "Steewart," it was "St'rt," kind of a bark. There are many Southern accents; his was aristocratic and quite clipped. The vowels were clipped, of course, but he didn't slur or drop consonants. He was an actor, too, as of course, they all are. He had great histrionic gifts. He was an orator before the days when oratory died out around here and they all read their speeches.

Well, these phones would ring and we'd jump, maybe one, two, or three of us, and all I had to do was open my door and walk across and open his. He had the corner office. It was a typical new Senate

page 82

Office Building office: bookcases, carpeting, unopenable windows, big desk, but nothing of the quality and character of those grand old offices in the Russell Building. He didn't want to move over here, but all the committee chairmen--almost all--did, under great pressure, as they are now using, I guess, to get senators to move to the Hart Building, twisting their arms off. I think they all did finally, [Richard] Russell, [Carl] Hayden, I'm not sure about Hayden, he may have stayed in the Capitol. After all, he was president pro tempore.

RITCHIE: Did they all take offices next to their committee rooms?

MCCLURE: That was the idea. Of course, when there was a change in chairmen that system broke down quickly. But for quite a time the chairmen stayed the same.

RITCHIE: Hill was essentially a liberal senator, and yet he represented one of the most conservative states. What kind of problems did that pose for him?

MCCLURE: Well, I would amend your question to say: Why did Alabama have such a liberal delegation in the '50s? [John] Sparkman, Carl Elliott, Bob Jones, Albert Rains. There were six members of Congress from Alabama, they were the most liberal delegation of any state in the country. I don't understand it, really, except that at

page 83

the time they were elected, the issues in the South were economic, pulling themselves up, needing federal help, public works, and other things. These men knew how to get it and could work up here effectively. When the race issue arose in virulent form in the '60s they all became vulnerable.

Lister Hill almost lost his election in '62. I think he won by 700 votes or something incredibly close. Sparkman seemed to have survived without difficulty, of course he had a different constituency. Senators have different constituencies in their own states, as you know. Lister Hill's was based on the county judges, his organization. I've forgotten how many there were, ninety or so. And these gentlemen were all young men with him, and all grew old with him, and then they began to die out and the base of his organization began to fritter away. He didn't know the new judges. They at the time had been the political leaders of each county. Sparkman, I don't know what he based his organization on, some other constituency. He's from north Alabama, which is a more liberal area, more modern anyway. So was Elliott, so was Jones, the bloc of congressmen from the northern part of the state were more liberal than the others. So I think that's one explanation. These men were responding to the kind of issues that bothered the people of Alabama after the war, until the race thing came, and then they were not. Now the state is mostly Republican.

page 84

RITCHIE: Hill signed the Southern Manifesto against the Supreme Court

MCCLURE: They all did.

RITCHIE: Basically came out against Civil Rights legislation, voted against the Act of 1957

MCCLURE: But if you read his speeches, he never was a racist.

RITCHIE: I was wondering if this was basically the bottom line of what he had to do to get elected?

MCCLURE: Yes, they all did. [J. William] Fulbright and everybody. They couldn't stand out alone against this pressure. But Hill's proposition was strictly constitutional. He wouldn't let a word of racism appear in his speeches. He didn't wring the damn bloody rag or anything of that sort, whatever the expression is. He never "niggered" or "outsegged" anybody. It was a tragic time for people like Russell. He could have been president, I think, but he was paralyzed. Well, he wasn't paralyzed in the Senate, I don't mean that. But I mean politically, as a potential president.

Lister Hill was considered a presidential candidate in '48, I think, and he was also considered for Majority Leader, and didn't feel he dared take it, even that early. Maybe I'm overstressing whether he dared or not, but anyway he didn't. Well, of course,

page 85

Tennessee had [Albert] Gore and [Estes] Kefauver, and pretty liberal congressmen, but it's still not deep South compared with Alabama, and Mississippi, and Georgia. Yes, I think he had to be much more careful as these years went on. I remember him coming back from the '62 election and talking to me after a meeting. You could see he was shaken, he had just barely squeaked in. I've forgotten his exact words, but their implication was, "Well, from here on you're not going to recognize me in many cases." I knew what he meant.

RITCHIE: He changed his voting?

MCCLURE: Yes, he had to. He had to be very careful in every bill that was reported out. You remember the Powell amendment that was always raised by Adam Powell, the anti -segregation amendment to any education bill. That was another reason for Lister to stay out of the education field; we'd have to tangle with that issue every time we went to the floor, or to a conference with the House.

RITCHIE: I also noted that he didn't seem to be associated with labor issues as much as with medical issues.

MCCLURE: No, he was not happy with labor issues. The labor movement in Alabama was not very powerful. There was one, of course, steel workers in Birmingham and other kinds of organized labor, but they were not anything like they are in Northern states; whereas organized business is pretty damn strong. He told me once when

page 86

[A.S.] Monroney was proposing to split the committee into labor and education, two different committees, a reorganization act that never occurred--I broke my neck stopping that one--but Lister didn't give a damn. He was going to retire; this was in '68 I guess. He said, "Well, I never wanted to bother with this labor stuff anyway."

On the other hand, when he first came to the Senate and was in a primary race, the House had passed the Fair Labor Standards bill, and the senators from the South were waiting to see what happened to Lister Hill in this primary because it was an issue there. He had a great line about how he couldn't see why Southern workers shouldn't be just as well paid as workers in the North. He won and, therefore, the senators who wanted to go for the bill but were worried about its popularity in the South went along, too, and it became law. It was that test election that involved him in a labor matter before he even got here.

RITCHIE: The most interesting thing about the '50s is that the biggest labor investigation was the McClellan Racketeering Committee

MCCLURE: Sure.

RITCHIE: Which had some Labor Committee members on, but McClellan wasn't a Labor Committee member

page 87

MCCLURE: No, there were four from Government Op [Government Operations Committee].

RITCHIE: And they got the public attention. I would have thought that the chairman of the Labor Committee would have wanted to be in the limelight on a thing like that, but it was McClellan not Hill who chaired the special committee.

MCCLURE: Senator Hill never had any desire to make big splashes and investigations. That was not his style. He was not a prosecutor. He didn't enjoy that kind of stuff, and that's what this was going to be. They were out to get Jimmy Hoffa. We had four members on the committee, [Pat] McNamara was one, I remember, I've forgotten the other three.

RITCHIE: Kennedy and Goldwater were on, I know.

MCCLURE: Yes, but there were four, and who the fourth one was I don't remember. But, of course, the results of the McClellan investigation ended up with Landrum-Griffin, and that we did handle. Just as an aside, in '56 or something, Senator Jack Kennedy was a member of the committee and Bill Reidy, who was our health man, and I, and Charlie Brewton, who was Lister's AA, got very interested in the problems of the aging, as a political question. We got Wilbur Cohen who was then I think at the University of Michigan --remember he was one of the founders of the Social Security System and was

later Secretary

page 88

of HEW, a great man, terrific person--to conduct a survey of the literature on the aging, gerontology and geriatrics and everything else involved. We published a bunch of volumes on it, and Senator Hill created a special subcommittee on aging with Pat McNamara, who was the oldest man on the committee as chairman. McNamara really wasn't much interested in being a senator; he just went through here kind of putting up with it, but he liked this subject and worked on it.

But before Senator Hill appointed him, he asked us to suggest some other senators who might be interested. We all said Jack Kennedy; he's the youngest member, and an enormous percentage of the people in Massachusetts and New England generally are older, older than the rest of the population. I mean, the proportion is greater in New England, except in Iowa. Maybe California and Florida now, but in those days it made sense politically, and it was a beautiful issue; he couldn't get hurt doing it. So Bill and I went to see Ted Sorenson, who was Kennedy's legislative aide, and we laid it out, the great prospects for this young man. I'll never forget Sorenson saying, with a grimness in his voice: "Senator Kennedy will never be interested in the problems of the aging. Thank you very much." Of course, the election of 1960 involved just that question, to a large extent. And then Kennedy wound up as chairman of the Labor Subcommittee and had to have all this awful Landrum-Griffin stuff. I didn't think Sorenson advised him wisely at that time. Because

page 89

McNamara would have ended up with Labor; in fact he did ultimately. Ah, that was funny!

RITCHIE: Was there much interaction between the staff of the committee and the staff of senators who were members?

MCCLURE: Oh, absolutely. I made it a point, and I think most of them did, too, to become very good friends with every administrative assistant, and every legislative assistant, and secretary if possible. All of them in Democratic offices and the top guys in the Republican offices, too. Sure, and that went for the minority staff also. We were always close. We fought like demons on issues but we were friends and there was none of that knifing that can go on when staffs are not collaborating. But I think Senator

Hill just set the tone or the atmosphere of it, to do things and not fight with each other.

I remember the very first evidence of that was after I'd been named staff director. Bill Reidy had been there quite a long time and he was a professional staff member. He became furious and went to see the chairman and said, "That job is called chief clerk, and I don't want Stewart McClure to be directing me as the staff director." So Senator Hill called me in and told me this. I said, "Well it doesn't make any difference to me what the title is, Senator, chief clerk is the official title anyway, let's make me chief clerk." Well, that settled that, but I could see that he didn't want

page 90

any of this silly internecine backbiting and so forth. Of course there was some later, but not then. And that's the way he operated generally. I made it a point to know everybody whom I could possibly have need to call on. You see, I had to poll the committee frequently when they broke up before a final vote. I had to know whom to call and how to get him to act. Many of them would act on my say so, or I'd say, "Senator Hill wants this." "Oh, well, sure."

RITCHIE: Would you deal with the senator or with the senator's assistant?

MCCLURE: No, I tried to be as anonymous as possible. Some staff people spend a lot of time currying favor with senators, becoming pals with them. I didn't feel that was really my role. That was Senator Hill's role. My job was to work with the staff. Of course, if Senator Hill said "Please go ask Senator [Jennings] Randolph something, I naturally did it. But normally it was done on two levels. Of course, it made the staff members of the senators happy because they knew what was going on. There's nothing worse than to have your senator taking a position that you didn't know he was going to take, because he talked to somebody on the staff of a committee. That's not good. You can't win just one battle here, you might lose seven others right afterwards.

RITCHIE: In the '50s, when you started out, the Congress was for the most part controlled by the Democrats, with the exception of

page 91

the 83rd, at least the whole time you were on the Labor Committee staff the Democrats were in the

majority. But the administration was Republican

MCCLURE: Yes, until Kennedy.

RITCHIE: Did that make the committee more independent? What were the relations between the Democratic Labor Committee and the Republican administration?

MCCLURE: Well, of course it varied with the secretaries of Labor and HEW, in the case of our committee. Senator Hill always tried to be collaborative with who were they; Jim Mitchell in the Labor Department, Folsom, and Mrs. Hobby--that was a little more difficult. But on the working level, below the secretary and assistant secretary level, unless there was such a deep policy split that the guys downtown couldn't open their mouths, or we didn't want to tell them something, we worked pretty well with them, on a great many bills, health bills especially. When we were doing something about extending and improving the Fair Labor Standards Act, the Labor Department lent us a specialist, a technical guy who worked on it. And they would supply any kind of information. There was almost never any hiding--well, it had nothing to do with national security, you know, and we weren't dealing with hypersensitive issues, though some of them were politically sensitive. Other staff men may have had different relations than I did.

page 92

I didn't like their policies frequently, but the people we were dealing with were after all mostly bureaucrats who had been here and would be here, and they did their very best to supply whatever we wanted. There was a famous guy in the Education Office, called Lilly-white, he knew all about the most abstruse education law there is: impacted aid. That's legislation that grants federal funds to districts where there are military installations and defense plants that sop up some of the taxable property. There are different categories of children, and--oh, it was just a madhouse. But old Lilly-white knew it cold. He could lead us through this minefield, and there were guys like that in many sections, Food and Drug and other mysterious places--we handled that, of course. You can get lost in technicalities there.

I think the only time we had real trouble, and it wasn't due to the Democrats, was a bill involving federal mine safety standards. Senator Joseph Clark, coming from Pennsylvania, was promoting a strengthening of the safety precautions, but [John Sherman] Cooper, who was from Kentucky and who was on the committee as a Republican, rose in defense of the eastern Kentucky small mine operators who can't afford any kind of safety provisions. They dig a hole in the side of a mountain and maybe have five employees, and their mines are always collapsing and it's a terribly dangerous kind of work. But to bring them under federal regulation, Cooper claimed, would just put them all out of business.

They couldn't possibly install all the

page 93

timbers and gas gauges and everything else. So he put up a fabulous struggle, and of course the great John L. Lewis was still around and the mine workers were banging all the doors. Alabama had a lot of coal mines, too, so we had lots of pressure from them, and West Virginia, and so forth. Well, we had hearings and the Coal Mine Safety Board was resistant to this. We didn't need any more regulations was the line of the administration. They didn't want deregulation, they just didn't want any more.

Cooper prevailed on Senator Hill as chairman of the full committee to have the head of the Mine Safety Board come up and "give us the facts." Boy, it was like pulling teeth. He just was so resistant--he was under orders in effect not to talk, and so were his staff. So finally the committee dismissed him because they were just getting nothing and Cooper was at his wits' end because the Democrats had the votes and were going to report it. It was late in the session. So the old fox pulled out a bunch of handwritten amendments, in ink, and spread them in front of him, and then knocked over the water pitcher. That was the end of the meeting! They couldn't proceed. I loved that.

But that was a case where the administration would not get involved. The same thing happened later with black lung. They were very resistant to make payments for that dreadful disease. But they finally gave in. I think you get these conflicts where powerful

page 94

business interests have a lock on some aspect of the Department in question, or powerful medical interests such as the AMA [American Medical Association] or a hospital association. Then the administration, a Republican administration particularly, can become very sticky because they're under the gun from the people who paid for the election. I'd have to really reflect to give you more on it than I have.

RITCHIE: Well you have a conservative Republican administration, and a relatively liberal Senate. What about the House? How did they figure into the equation when you were pushing new legislation? Did you have to assume that the House was going to be more conservative and dug-in on these issues?

MCCLURE: Yes, indeed. The chairman of the House Committee on Education and Labor was Graham Barden of North Carolina, a tough, thick-necked, immutable, immoveable, rock-ribbed chairman. He wanted to repeal the Fair Labor Standards Act for the textile mills down there; he didn't want to increase the minimum wage, he wanted to abolish it, and as for additional coverage he was for repealing it back to nothing. Well, he was chairman of the House committee, which meant that he was in charge of education, too. And he wasn't in favor of federal aid to school construction or teachers' salaries or anything like that. It was just pulling teeth to get anything through there during the 150s. Of course he had allies on his

page 95

committee, he wasn't alone, and the majority of them were liberals but they couldn't do a damn thing--except be obstreperous like Adam Powell with his damn amendment.

But there were good men and now [Carl] Perkins is a great chairman. I think Powell was a good chairman, too, before he went fluttering around Bimini. We dealt with the Commerce Committee on health matters, which of course is a different kind of constituency all together, different issues. There is no anti-veterans lobby. There are different positions within the organizations, but if you wanted to approve a veterans bill or act you didn't have to fight the NAM [National Association of Manufacturers] or something to do it. You might have to fight the Treasury Department over money. I think the chairman of that at the time was this fellow from Texas who later became chairman of the Science Committee, Olin Teague. He and Hill were old friends; Hill knew him in the House. So we'd have a conference that was like taffy-pulling. I mean, just fun.

But Hill had a bit of trouble with the House Commerce Committee under Oren Harris, even though everything went through the Senate smooth as glass. Especially in conferences--of course, House members come to conferences so damn well prepared, they have no other committees. Senators come staggering out of one committee and go into a conference and then back to the floor, and it's very hard to educate them. Well, if you've ever been in a conference you know that the

page 96

senators are one or two and everybody on the House side is there. They require a quorum of the conferees on the House side. And do they hate it, to sit there twelve of them looking at one senator,

who speaks for the whole United States Senate!

Of course, once a bill did come over from the House it had gone through the fires of Hell and we didn't have too much trouble with it. I mean, they were generally bills that we favored anyway, but never could get through ourselves coming from the Senate side. But once it got passed the House, then it was probably going to become law. Well, all that changed with the departure of Barden and the accession of Lyndon [Johnson] to the White House. Then we galloped into the War on Poverty and the Great Society. I had never seen so much activity in my life around here! We were passing major bills every week. It was unbelievable. Just a great dam broke. Everything but national health insurance, everything that had been piled up since Truman plus a lot of new stuff. Jesus, it was fun!

RITCHIE: Before we talk about Johnson as president, could you talk a little about him as majority leader? What kind of dealings did you and the committee have with him in those days?

MCCLURE: Well, I had very few dealings with him. He was a tiger up here, there's no question about it. All in great friendliness and rubbing of the shoulders and pumping of the hands; he was a tough man of steel . When he wanted action it generally took

page 97

place. He had a technique he used once or twice. He had Bobby Baker invite all the staff directors over for coffee in a room in the Capitol and then he came in and massaged us, about how important we were and how we could go back and get our chairmen cracking and get those bills out of committee. We were all wagging our heads. How did he think we could do it if he couldn't? It was sort of amusing. He went to any length, in other words to get something moving. Of course, he had the best intelligence system: Bobby Baker knew what the vote was going to be every time. He had a head counter par excellence, so there weren't too many surprises when a bill was going to come up.

I used to watch him on the floor, pacing around like a panther and being frustrated and going over and rubbing some senator to try and get him to do something. Worked at it indefatigably. Johnson worked all the time. His staff never got any sleep. He was a powerhouse. I think a lot of people were scared of him, I mean the members, because he controlled a lot of money in election time. While I don't go for Robert Caro's book [*The Path To Power*] wholeheartedly, I do believe it's true that he used Texas oil money to help Democrats get elected and then they were beholden to him thereafter. Now, of course, that didn't affect Lister Hill--he didn't need a nickel. But some of them did.

page 98

I never heard Senator Hill refer to Lyndon in any way except "the Majority Leader." I don't know what he thought of him. He dealt with him, of course, as the leader; actually he had been here considerably longer. In fact, it would be hard to tell you what Lister Hill thought of most of them. He was like Gillette that way.

RITCHIE: You once mentioned Johnson talking about Paul Douglas, what was that quote?

MCCLURE: He said Douglas was probably back in his office "writhing around on his couch like Mossadegh."

RITCHIE: In what circumstances was Johnson referring to Douglas that way?

MCCLURE: It must have been in response to "Where's Douglas?" Probably at a meeting, or maybe he was needed on the floor. I don't know how it occurred, but I remember I'd just been over in Douglas' office at a meeting on what became the Area Development Act, which Douglas had dreamed up, and he was writhing around on his leather couch! He had dengue fever from the South Pacific; he was in agony most of his life up here. As with Jack Kennedy, a number of members were dying of pain most of the time. Teddy Kennedy, same thing. You wonder how they function, especially with back problems.

page 99

RITCHIE: You mentioned before about Pat McNamara not wanting to be a senator and just passing through. Did you have problems with senators who really didn't carry their weight in the committee?

MCCLURE: There was always a problem with the quorum. Lister Hill would get mad; he would yell "Get on the horn and get those people over here, Stewart." Well, what can you do? I'd call and call and call. Where is he? Send out scouts. But they were spread too thin. They were in some meeting where they were really needed, or they had an amendment up, or something. They weren't taking the afternoon off, these were busy men. It was very hard, still is hard to get a quorum. Of course, they fixed that rule a little so you could go on past noon. But I don't recall any problem within the committee, except the quorum problem. All the Democrats had subcommittee chairmanships at the end, every one of them. So they had responsibilities; bills were referred to them by letter from the chairman; they would

find out if he really wanted them to act on it (he wouldn't even refer it if he didn't, usually, or unless they requested it--he never sat on legislation even though he was horrified by some of the things that went on).

But I don't know, I don't recall any Democratic senators who didn't perform. Now what their private notions of being senators were, I don't know. Joe Clark was very unhappy with the Senate and wrote a book about it, and made himself most unpopular. McNamara

page 100

just--he never thought that being a senator was very important. I think he thought the school board of Detroit was a much better place to be. You'd see him sitting over in the lobby on the couch, talking to anybody who came by and cracking jokes. He'd make some remark, "Is that jerk still talking in there?" He was pretty crude in his private speech, but a loveable guy, a lot of fun.

RITCHIE: The two senators who seemed to vote against everything in the committee in those days were Barry Goldwater and Strom Thurmond. It seemed as if the Labor Committee was one that liberal senators gravitated towards

MCCLURE: They were assigned to it.

RITCHIE: I see, was that to keep them out of other committees?

MCCLURE: Yes. Put them all in one bag and then try to defeat anything they came out with.

RITCHIE: Was that a decision on the part of

MCCLURE: The leadership.

RITCHIE: But Hill was a part of the "Inner Club," wasn't he?

MCCLURE: Yes, but he couldn't control that process. Some of them wanted to be on it very much, but some of them didn't. I'll never forget I went to Senator Joe Clark when he was first

page 101

appointed. I walked into his office--he had stripped it of all senatorial equipment, and had nothing but his own fancy stuff from Philadelphia, modern tube furniture and all that. It looked like a lawyer's office in Philadelphia. He said, "Stewart, I want you to understand one thing: I didn't want to come on this committee, and I'm going to get off it the first opportunity I have." I said, "You want me to tell Senator Hill that, sir?" That stopped him. I never did.

We talked a while and I said, "Well Senator, if something should come up around here that I think you might be interested in, that would make this a more attractive place to you, may I bring it to your attention?" "Oh," he said, "of course, Stewart." Well, in due course something did, the manpower question. He got a Subcommittee on Manpower Employment and ran a long way with it. Did a lot of good with it, I think, and when the time came when he had to leave one committee to get on Foreign Relations, he left Banking, he didn't leave Labor. I mentioned that to him once later. He pretended not to know what I was talking about. He was the only one I ever heard *say* it like that.

Thurmond got off as soon as he could, too, and then became a Republican anyway. He was a real problem because we had seven Democratic members, in the old days, seven to six, and he would flip over, switch, and Goldwater of course was riveted in the country club

page 102

philosophy that is now riveted in the White House. He just wouldn't do anything. He had a very able committee counsel, Mike Bernstein, who was as conservative as he was, and who fed him bile and brimstone every day. Goldwater was a very decent fellow basically, but his ideas were antediluvian. Then we had George Murphy for a while; that was funny. The movie actor--boy was he out of his depth! I expected him to break into a tap dance or something. He was very popular, and all the staff who loved his movies loved him. He didn't do anything for or against. I don't think he ever offered a bill or an amendment or anything. Flitted his way through. Funny, funny, funny.

We had [Everett] Dirksen for a while. When he was minority leader he would give new Republicans breaks on committees. He didn't give a damn what committee he was on; he was minority leader anyway. So held leave his seniority positions, and he went on Labor at one point. He was a tough customer but a joy to be with, too. His techniques of combat in committee were something. One time there was a bill reported from Kennedy's Labor Subcommittee involving the prohibition on secondary boycott in Taft-Hartley, which labor unions had been fighting for centuries ever since Taft-Hartley. It had gotten out of subcommittee and Dirksen was determined to stop it. We still had the twelve o'clock rule. When the Senate went in, we had to break up. So he was very late getting there anyway. The

Republicans

page 103

refused to make a quorum until the last Democrat came to make the quorum, and then they came in.

Dirksen came in with a stack of books about this high, hearings from the Judiciary Committee, which he put on the desk. Kennedy's face fell. After the preliminaries, Kennedy made his pitch for the bill, and then Hill recognized Dirksen, who had asked him to do so. Dirksen said, "Well, we've been considering legislation in the Judiciary Committee that has a bearing on this legislation, particularly as it affects the Northwestern Railway. I have here a history of the Northwestern Railway, which I want to place in this record, if the chairman will permit." And he read the history of the Northwestern Railway till noon. The bell rang and we broke up. Oh, God! Kennedy was laughing and everybody was broken up, it was just a preposterous business. "Then in 1864 . . ." you know. God, he was funny. But they all had to use what weapons they could, and the quorum game was the biggest one.

RITCHIE: So the quorum problem wasn't just that members were busy, but it was often deliberate.

MCCLURE: On this kind of thing it was used politically, sure.

RITCHIE: The minority members could use it to their advantage, knowing that the majority might not all be there.

page 104

MCCLURE: That's right. Well, they had a scout watching. Of course the quorum changes with the size of the subcommittee or committee, and when the proper number of Democrats were in the room then the Republicans would arrive, or some of them. And sometimes not enough Democrats came, and you quit, particularly in the beginning when it was seven to six. Later when we had as many as ten Democrats to seven Republicans, or nine to six--well it varied from Congress to Congress--when we had a two or three man majority then the minority couldn't do much.

RITCHIE: I would assume that you saw a lot of lobbyists in those days.

MCCLURE: Oh, sure. They didn't come to me as much as they did to the professional staff. They came to me about scheduling hearings or just on a scouting mission, but they didn't lobby me in the true sense. They knew I wasn't transporting such information to Lister Hill anyway, or to the chairmen of the subcommittees. The staffs of those units were doing that.

page 105

End of Interview #3
