

## HARRISON WILLIAMS AND THE LABOR COMMITTEE

### Interview #8

Tuesday, May 3, 1983

**RITCHIE:** What was it that drew you from the Public Works Committee back to the Labor Committee?

**MCCLURE:** Poetic justice, really. I had a perfectly lovely job with the Public Works Committee. I was friends with all the staff. The chairman, Randolph, was a favorite man of mine. I got along with everybody and I did very interesting work, but I had been a staff director and I'd been ousted in a manner that was degrading, I thought. While it was quite appropriate that the new chairman is entitled to have his own man, the manner in which he'd done it was so stupid and crude and inhumane, I really thought I had been unjustly expelled from my job, and I wanted it back.

The other thing about it, professionally speaking, was that as a professional staff member one had a rather limited field of activity. One was assigned a bill or an area of concern, and one performed within those limits. Well, I'd been used to dealing with the entire spectrum of legislation and subcommittees that the Labor Committee handled, and the subcommittees it created to handle it. It was a very broad spectrum with everything from labor and education and health on through to juvenile delinquency and the arts and

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humanities and alcoholism and anything one can think of. We had fifteen subcommittees, which was a much bigger arena, so I was tempted to go back and be in that arena rather than this more circumscribed spot on the Public Works Committee. But I left the Public Works Committee loving them all, and Randolph understood quite well why I was seeking to do what I was doing, and supported me, too.

In the campaign of 1970, Senator Williams, who had had a history of alcoholism in the Senate, which was well known to everyone, and there had been some sad scenes in New Jersey--I believe at some NAACP convention he fell down off the platform drunk as a goat, you know, it was really very bad--and the party bosses in New Jersey said they were going to dump him because he would be defeated by any Republican. Well, for whatever reasons, Senator Williams performed a very difficult task. He stopped drinking, he joined the AAs [Alcoholics Anonymous], he concentrated on physical exercise, and as far as I know he's never had a drink since. If you see him sipping something it's ginger ale as a rule. He defeated this demon, and I have enormous respect for him. In the process he went on

television in New Jersey and told the people of New Jersey that he had had an alcoholic problem but it had been licked and never again would the filthy stuff pass his lips.

Then the party bosses believed him, and it was true, and the unions, who were the biggest force in the state, said, "Fine, we love

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Pete Williams, but we couldn't take him the way he was\* We'll all go for him." But there was lagging, of course, among the troops who hadn't studied the whole question, and his reputation was very poor in that respect. So, I don't know who it was but somebody went to Senator Randolph, who was then the ranking Democratic member of the Labor Committee. He had a choice of chairing either committee, and he sent forth an announcement which was used in the Williams campaign very heavily, endorsing Williams and saying that if Williams were elected he would be the chairman of the Labor Committee because Senator Randolph intended to stay as chairman of Public Works, thereby opening the way and taking himself out of the seniority ladder on the Labor Committee. That was very helpful to Pete, of course, to Senator Williams, because then they were not only reelecting a senator, they were electing a chairman of a very potent committee that had enormous impact on the state of New Jersey. It's a people committee, and New Jersey's an urban state, really. The committee, other than the Banking and Housing Committee, probably has more impact on persons living in New Jersey than any other Senate committee. So they had every good reason to support Williams, and he won.

I sent him a contribution and I was in touch with his people, and I knew them anyway. He returned to Washington briefly after the election and I paid my respects and told him I was eager to come back and work with him. I planted the seeds, so to speak. Well, he

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disappeared, went into some health spa or something over Christmas. So I generated a certain amount of lobbying, internal and external, but I could never get to see him. It was a little like seeking Yarborough as to when he was going to fire me as it was to see Williams to persuade him to hire me! There was just one little black spot in the whole thing. I ran into my old friend Frederick Blackwell, who worked on the Labor Committee and had been Senator Williams' staff man on migratory labor and his drinking companion or hand-holding companion when Williams was sopping up stuff in all the

bars in town. Fred and I had always been very close. He said, "Stewart, you're making a big mistake. It won't work. It isn't like it used to be. It never will be. Senator Hill's gone. Yarborough's gone. This committee is not what it used to be and never will be again. You won't be able to stand it. Don't do it." Well, in my excess of hubris and certitude that I could conquer all these minor obstacles and difficulties I brushed that aside, but I remembered it. In due course I had reason to. But he gave me the warning and I didn't listen to it. I didn't follow his suggestions.

Finally, I cornered Senator Williams in a hallway someplace. It was getting to be the first of January or near there, and I said, "Senator, we're going to have a new Senate in about a few days and then we'll have to have an organizational meeting. I would like to know if you're going to hire me as your staff director. If not, I must tell Senator Randolph and the staff there so they can put me

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back to work in that committee, or find somebody to take my place if I move here." I gave him all the reasons why he had to make a decision. So he said, "All right, bring me the papers." Well, Randolph was chairman, technically, until the Senate reorganized. So I had this weird set-up in which Randolph ordered me taken off the Public Works Committee and put on the Labor Committee as acting chairman of the Labor Committee. So Williams never really signed me on. Technically, it had to be done that way. I carried the papers around to Brenkworth, and it was all done.

Then the new world opened upon me and it was not at all like it had ever been before. In the first place, I couldn't find my chairman: the first week in January, the second week in January, the third week in January. He had a new AA named Ben Palombo, a professor from Princeton, able, capable young man, and a couple of other new people. On the Labor Committee I found some persons who had been brought in by Yarborough, very good men, most of them, from the Labor Department: Bob Nagle, Nik Edes, and another chap whose name escapes my mind although he was an extremely able guy. They were on the Labor subcommittee which Yarborough had been chairing, and Williams liked them all and intended to keep them, too. So I met these chaps whom I had not known, and we found we got along very well. Nagle was chief counsel and the other guy was counsel of the subcommittee on Labor, and I've forgotten what Nik's job was.

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But also there was a huge hang-over of Yarborough people, including Mr. Robert Harris, who'd been the staff director. Since Yarborough had been defeated in the primary in June, his boys had *loaded* the committee with friends who did nothing, I mean they just drew salaries. There were ten or twelve guys who had nothing to do, but they were pulling down Senate money as Yarborough appointees. I don't think he even knew they were there. You know, Harris pushed the papers around and they did it. Well, those boys were all going to go and they knew it. I didn't even have to tell them. We just couldn't have them around. They were doing nothing; they had no connection with Williams. There was a room at the end of the suite, separated by the minority offices, and it had two desks and a few telephones. I told these guys to use that room to find jobs, which they all did in due course. All from Texas--what a gang!

Then Mr. Harris, I called on him and I said, "I don't have a green parking sticker to give you, because I've been parking over under the fountain [underground Senate parking garage] in a numbered slot, but I would like my parking place in the [Dirksen Office Building] garage back again." He said, "No problem. I'm going to be staff director of the DC [District of Columbia] Committee under Senator [Thomas] Eagleton, and I've got a slot about three steps from yours." That's a great story of the parking lot and parking spaces!

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There was a girl who'd been a pain in the neck to me for years, a girl named Lucille Gould, from North Carolina, I believe. She'd been hired in a critical moment way back in the beginning, when we needed an extra secretary. One of the old-line staff people who'd been there long before I came, named Chick Heerlein, a nice simple-minded chap who'd been a minor clerk to the committee since the beginning of the century, I guess--there were quite a few old characters around when I first came aboard with Lister Hill--well, this fellow had stayed on. Calendar clerk, that was his job. So when we needed a clerk he said, "Oh, I know just the girl, she works for a congressman from North Carolina and she's looking for a job." So over she came.

She was damn good. She was a very efficient, competent, capable secretary. She could not be faulted by anybody. But she was a bitch. She tortured all the other girls. She tortured me! But every guy she worked for--and she worked for every staff man on the Subcommittee on Labor that we had--couldn't do without her. She knew all the union guys, she knew all the lobbyists, she knew where the files were, she knew who said what in what meeting and what time. Absolutely superb professional staff person, but a virago, hoyden. Girls would come in to me weeping: "Mr. McClure, I can't work in that office any longer if that bitch is going to be there!" So I'd try to fire her and her guy each time--Ralph Dungan had her, John Sweeney, John Bruff, Don Baker; I can't remember them all--everyone

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of them, they knew she was a hell of a problem for everybody, but she was so good for their purposes that they would never allow me to get rid of her.

Bob Harris had been the latest Labor Subcommittee counsel when I was still there the first time, and he had latched on to Lucille. He brought her into his office with him as secretary to the staff director, and expelled my old secretary Marjorie Whitaker, who'd been there longer than anybody practically. She was dumped into nowhere land. They didn't fire her but they just didn't give her anything to do. She'd come down to the Public Works Committee and weep, and I'd take her to lunch and pat her hand: "Maybe things will get better, Marjorie." Well, they did for her. The first thing I did was to summon Lucille Gould--after I'd traded parking places with her superior officer. I said, "Lucille, you are going on extended leave." She said, "What's that?" I said, "It's leave requiring you not to come to the office, allowing you time to find another job at which time your leave will cease. Goodbye." That was that. Then Marjorie came streaming back in in all her glory, fixed the office the way it had been, moved the furniture back the way it had been, got rid of all the Lucille Gould doodads. It was a moment of triumph. Oh, dear, what fun.

Well, still my chairman was not available. We had a lot of new, to me, members. I didn't know Eagleton, I didn't know [Alan]

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Cranston. There was one other who'd come into the committee while I was on Public Works, Harold Hughes of Iowa. Well, they all had to have subcommittees, of course. The regular structure pretty much remained. Yarborough was no longer there so the new chairman of the Subcommittee on Labor was Williams. Then he merged Migratory Labor with it so he wouldn't violate the new rule that no senator can hold more than one subcommittee chairmanship on a given committee.

Senator Eagleton came and said, "I would like to have the Subcommittee on Aging." That was a nice, easy research-kind of subcommittee, well they had some legislative power. I said, "Well, I'm terribly sorry, Senator, but Senator Cranston's man has told me that was what he would like." And Eagleton--I'd never had a senator come to my desk before he did--said "Stewart, you may not realize it, but when I was elected in 1968 in Missouri, the governor appointed me to the Senate the day after the election, so I have seniority over Senator Cranston." Oh, God. "I didn't know that, sir." He said,

"Well that's the way it is." So now I had to go to Cranston, who was not in town either--he was in California--go to his man, Jonathan Steinberg, and explain this situation. But I shouldn't have had to be doing this at all. I was not the chairman of this committee. Here I was dealing with United States senators over subcommittee chairmanships, which were the life blood of any senator. It was absolutely awful.

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There were others of that kind where I just got into terrible binds. I had to make decisions I had no power to make, and the people who received the word operated on it as if I did, and then I'd have to later get Senator Williams to ratify it. It was awful. Papers piling up, the horrendous appearance before the Rules Committee to get our money was looming, and there was still no chairman. It was the most ungodly month I ever spent. As anyone working around here knows, when your boss is unavailable--I couldn't even find him on the phone--and you've got to do things, the law requires things to be done, the facts require them, other senators require them. Oh, God, it was awful.

But of course, in due time he appeared on the scene, bristling and ready to go, and everything was apparently normal. Then he said, "Well, we better have an organizational meeting. Call all the Democratic senators over to your office and assign subcommittee chairmanships and memberships and work all this out." Bob Nagle and I did the paperwork of who wanted what and who could have what, and fitted it in to this, that, and the other. The meeting took place and it was all very cordial. Everybody was happy to have Senator Williams as chairman, I think they really were. He was a charming guy and everybody liked him. He was sobered up and looked like he was ready to take charge and be the chairman.

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There was just this one loose end. Senator Cranston wasn't there. He had been eased out of the Subcommittee on Aging and there really wasn't another subcommittee. There would have to be one created. I told Jonathan Steinberg that and he was to get a hold of Cranston and come up with a suggestion. Well, Steinberg is alone without a senator in this staff and Democratic caucus. Senator Williams said, "Mr. Steinberg, you represent Senator Cranston I believe. What would you suggest we do to provide him with a subcommittee?" Steinberg, instead of saying, "I'm sorry, I can't speak for him, he's not here, could this be put off?" (which would have been a very sensible thing to do) leaped in and

said, "Yes, we want a subcommittee on the environment!" I looked over and here's Senator Randolph with the steam beginning to come out of his ears. Jesus, you know the Public Works Committee handles the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act. All of the environmental legislation in the Senate is in the Public Works Committee. I thought he would never get his speech out of his mouth. He said, "Bu-bu-but Mr. Chairman, rrrrrgh, I think it should be pointed out," and then he got a hold of himself, "that the Senate Public Works Committee has been considering legislation involving clean air and clean water and solid waste for many years, and has written a number of important laws . . . of

He went on in this self-controlled politeness, and poor old Steinberg was just shriveling. He hadn't given the first thought to, nor had he told me or anybody else this preposterous suggestion he

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was going to make. Well, at that point Senator Williams said, "I think we'd better wait till Senator Cranston returns to town. Thank you, Mr. Steinberg we'll deal with this matter at a later meeting." But it was so funny: a case of a staff man who was just so full of his own importance, speaking for his senator, and told to come up with an idea. He just splattered himself all over the place. It took him months to get anybody to give him any credence after that. Well, he went on to have a very fine career as the staff director of the Veterans Committee, which they set up later with Cranston as chairman, and an extremely able guy, but God he really got splattered that first time.

Then I had another hard job. This involved Senator Williams' present wife. Her name was Jeanette Smith, when she first came into view. She'd been employed in the House by Cornelius Gallagher, a congressman from New Jersey who subsequently went to jail. I don't know if she had anything to do with it, but indeed he did go to jail and she needed another job. Senator Williams had been in the House and a colleague of Gallagher's--and over there they went around dating each other's secretaries and so forth. I should add that Senator Williams was married and had four children, but his wife refused to come to Washington. Never would come and live in this city. It was terrible for him. Here's a bright, handsome, charming, gallant young man without a wife. What does he do? He goes out with

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other girls, of course. So Jeanette was one of his flock in the House. I think many of the House members in those days had active sex lives.

In due course, when Senator Williams became chairman of the Migratory Labor Subcommittee, back in the '60s, one of the new employees that he asked to be put on was Jeanette Smith, who was then married to a naval officer, I believe, living out in Chevy Chase. She was made a clerk of this subcommittee. I never could find out what she did there, except every time I came in the office she was on the phone, talking to some Italian politician in New Jersey. She really was his political agent. She had nothing to do with migratory labor, never came to the hearings, never knew anything about it. She was Senator Williams' political agent, keeping all the pockets sewed up and tempers cooled. There was always a stream of strange looking Italian gentlemen coming through all the time, part of the machinery of the New Jersey Democratic party. But she had an extremely strong hold over Senator Williams. In fact, she divorced her husband with a view to marrying Senator Williams in due course. He had to get divorced, too, and I guess he did, had to, because in--I don't know when it was--they became married.

Mrs. Williams remained on the subcommittee staff, where she assumed the title of chief clerk. Chief clerk of a subcommittee! I now understand they have such things, but in those days it didn't

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exist. Well, this was what he wanted so that's what happened. As time went on it was clear to me, and others too, probably before I saw it, that whatever decisions were being made, both in politics in New Jersey or in the operation of not only Senator Williams' personal office but to every degree possible the Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare were being made by Mrs. Williams, then still Mrs. Smith. There had to be at some point a clash, because either I was the staff director or she was. I stalled her off a long time, against terrible demands that somebody be fired because she'd heard her say something contrary to policy, or she was late in the office. Well, it soon turned out that Jeanette Smith had spies in my staff who were reporting to her on a daily basis on the arrival times and departures and length of lunch periods and office comportment of all my own staff, subcommittees and full.

Jeanette persuaded Ben Palombo, the committee chairman's administrative assistant, to have weekly staff meetings to discuss the full panoply of legislative interests and committee interests of Senator Williams. A guy would come from his subcommittee on Banking, which was securities, and somebody from the Rules Committee where he was a member, and three or four of us from the Labor Committee, and then his own staff. We'd sit around and hash the schedule for next week and how this bill was moving and that. And she would sit there, not quite presiding but an imposing presence behind Ben Palombo, who was presiding. These were horrible meetings. There was nothing

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really to discuss that couldn't be done over the phone in two seconds. It was just her way of exhibiting her power over all of us, and insisting on a report on such-and-such being written and submitted to the chairman, something that could be told on the end of a phone or by bumping into him in a corridor. But this was all her scheme of arranging the whole thing so that the chairman was running it all, but it was she who was running him.

Oh, boy, it was very tough on everybody. Nobody wanted this. You take orders from your chairman, of course, and you do what you're supposed to do, but here was this intervening black queen--we finally began calling her "the spider," if she ever laid her paws on you you could expect to be sucked dry and the husk thrown out the next Monday morning. I had to protect my own staff because she was determined to have somebody fired once a week. Later, when she was in full charge and I had left, that's what she did. Once a week somebody would be told on a Friday night, usually some girl who had just barely gotten there, that she was not proving out and her desk would be cleared out by Monday and somebody else would take her place. Every weekend the guillotine came down. Well, I didn't let that happen, but it was

tried all the time. Sometimes the senator himself would say, "I'm hearing funny reports about that girl who's handling this-or-that." I said, "What are you hearing, senator?" "Well, that she's never on her job." "That's not true, she's on her job all the time." I would

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say that this was just a lot of crap. I knew where he was getting it, and he knew I knew, but this was a silly dance we had to go through.

Meanwhile, we did proceed with legislation and we had a good session and reported bills that became law, and it went on on the surface as a well-run committee. Really it wasn't. The subcommittees just went hog-wild, did anything they wanted up, spent any money they wanted to, especially Senator [Edward] Kennedy's Health Subcommittee. I mean, I just had to finally . . . I couldn't get the chairman to talk to Kennedy to bring some kind of discipline. They were going out and hiring cars and trains and planes and spending enormous sums of money all over the country without consulting me or getting any approval of the expenditures. It all had to come back through vouchers, and that's where we stopped them, of course. We'd just say, "Well, this voucher isn't going to be paid. It will have to come out of your pocket." They were a loose-running band. Then, of course, Kennedy wasn't paying any attention to these details either. It was all at the staff level. They were making him look good, getting him in the

papers and on TV and all that, very well, but just as if the federal treasury had been opened to them to go hog wild. And no amount of verbal discipline on my part would stop them.

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I'd go to Williams and say, "Look, we can't go to Brenkworth and the Rules Committee with a bunch of vouchers like this. These are all illegal. You can't *do* what these people are trying to charge us for." He'd say, "Oh, dear, well." "You've got to tell Senator Kennedy to tell them to stop it. I can't tell Senator Kennedy to do anything." "Yeah, you're right, you're right Stewart." And then nothing would happen. That was what was awful. Within the committee, below the surface, behind the facade, and in rooms other than the public rooms, this thing was just shambling along, just crumbling along. If Senator Hill ran a tight ship--and he did--Senator Williams was running a kind of after-the-game melee of celebrants. This was chaotic.

I didn't see how I was going to stick it out. In the first place, I was sure that Jeanette was knifing me at every turn. I'd become close friends with Ben Palombo, the administrative assistant, which at least gave me one strong arm in that office, but he upped and quit one day and decided he was going to help Lloyd Bentsen become president. That was the end of that. Then I didn't have anybody over there whom I could trust, or who would dare to talk to me. You see, that was another part of the game. If you were seen with somebody, Jeanette would get the word and then put dubious connotations to work. Oh, boy, well, she worked at it all the time and did nothing else, so you couldn't take time from your job to fight all this off all the time. It was just sad as hell.

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The thing began coming to a head in 1973. I came back in '71 and I had stood the first session fairly successfully and the second one was halfway through. I was walking over to the floor with Senator Williams one day, and he said, "Stewart, what's this about this financial clerk you've got there? I understand she's not performing quite as well as she should." I said, "Well, I'm afraid I have to disagree with you, sir, she's kept the best books that anybody ever kept since I've been around here." He said, "Well, I hear she leaves early." I said, "Oh, you do? Well, she does. When her books are done and I've looked at them, I tell her to go home. There's no point in sitting there looking at the wall for an hour." He said, "Well, she could share in answering the telephone." Now, how the hell does he know about this? I said, "Well, we have four other girls in that office whose job it is to answer the telephone. They

don't handle these complicated vouchers and financial books, which if you'd ever seen them Senator you would know nobody can understand except Bob Brenkworth and a few of us who have spent our lives studying them. This girl does a fine job."

Afterward, I thought, oh boy, what is all this? Well, the girl had a funny name: Stewart (like I spell my first name) Home. I thought, I better find out how she got here, because I came back from Public Works and she was there. I had not hired her or had anything to do with her. Well, it turned out that she was married and lived down in Alexandria or some place. Her husband had disappeared and

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she was working in a bank, and she had come to the attention of the chief clerk of the Rules Committee, Gordon Harrison. Gordon was a hyper-active guy. He had had a heart attack or two and was popping nitro pills at every hour, and full of energy. He'd gone for this Stewart Home, but he didn't have any job on the Rules Committee for her, to save her from this bank. He and Harrison Williams were old-time buddies, irrespective of the fact that one was a senator and one was not they'd been carousing around Washington for years together. Gordon asked Harrison if he could persuade Yarborough to find this girl a job on the Labor Committee. I suppose all these Harris and Harrisons get funny but Bob Harris then was Labor Committee clerk and he naturally wanted to be cooperative with Senator Harrison Williams and to his good friend Gordon Harrison, who gave us the money [Rules Committee authorization], so this was worked out. This was before I was there, I mean between times.

So I thought, well, why is she being persecuted now? Why does Jeanette want to get her? Gordon Harrison and Harrison Williams are still very good friends. As far as I know, this girl and Gordon are very good friends. What is motivating Jeanette Smith? Then she took it upon herself to call me and say, "You know that girl Stewart Homme. You've got to get rid of her, Stewart. She's utterly impossible. All the other girls are complaining. She doesn't collaborate with them. She doesn't answer the phone. She takes hours for lunch. She comes in late, and goes out early." I said, "Jeanette,

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she's the best financial clerk we've ever had here. What else have you got against her? What is the point?" She said, "Well, you'll find out."

I was in the habit of telling Marjorie everything like this. She was my eyes and ears and always had been a very faithful secretary, public servant, spy, whatever you wish, whatever one expects one's secretary to do in terms of keeping one alert and informed. Marjorie was no fool and she always was careful to be friends with all the powers. She had a great welcoming smile. The senators would come through my office to go to the hearing room, and she'd say, gleamingly, "Would you care for a cup of coffee, Senator?" And they'd gleam back. She was beloved by all the men that came in and out, and of course, in time she'd made friends with Jeanette Smith--after all, the chairman's friend. So I told Marjorie this latest development, and I said, "Can you find out what the hell this is all about." Meaning, please find out from Jeanette why she wants to do in this girl over me, I'm the staff director. In due time, Marjorie reported back that Jeanette had been *told* by somebody that Harrison Williams had been seen embracing Stewart Homme in some corridor, and that was it. Whether that was true or not, of course, no one knows, but that was anyway the pretext that Mrs. Smith was operating on.

Well, I said, this is it, I'm going to cease being staff director in fact if I don't put an end to this. So, again Williams

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caught me in the hall and said, "I'm getting terrible reports about this Stewart Home. What are you going to do about it?" I said, "Well, I didn't think I should do anything until you'd talked with Gordon Harrison." That stopped that for a little while. I mean, he'd hired the girl because Gordon had asked him to. Here was I getting the rap. Well, Jeanette had covered the bases, too. I ran into Gordon at a party a day or two later. He was drunk, and he said, "You stinking bastard," and lit into me as an enemy. What was I doing to his friend Stewart Home? Oh, God, it was just hopeless. What could you do? Somebody had gotten to Gordon and switched it around that I was persecuting her. Maybe Stewart Home had told him that, I don't know. It was just getting to be hopeless. You couldn't do anything, and I was spending much more time on that kind of junk than on my job. Anyway, I refused to fire the girl for a long time.

Finally, I got an order from Williams himself and I had to act, because I'd just in effect said that I'm not going to do something that Jeanette Smith tells me to do. You want it done, you tell me. I mean, I had to get to that stage with him. It was awful, I'd never talked to a senator like that. Never had to deal with a man who couldn't be a man. Well, I got an order, and I told her, and she knew what it was all about, and I knew what it was all about, and Gordon Harrison, everybody knew what it was all about. But I was the goat and everybody -- Homme and Gordon Harrison--fingered me as the

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source of all this stuff, and that came back to Williams. His pal Gordon was furious at me, and therefore Harrison Williams was. It was the most damnable intrigue I've ever gotten into, and for no reason. I mean, there was nothing at issue, there was no public problem involved, there was nothing. Just a power struggle, really. Well, I said, the hell with this, this is hopeless.

About that time, I don't know what had been going on in the Williams office . . . wait a minute, Ben Palombo was still there, but in one of his last acts he came over and said, "You have three choices, you either have to quit, or become a consultant, or move out of this office and sit somewhere else. We're putting somebody else in your job." He was dying when he said it, and I knew it. I said, "Ok Ben, let me think about it." This was about June, I think, of '73. I knew that this new law had been passed that if you retired from the Senate by the end of '73, you had an eleven percent permanent increase in your pension. I wanted to round out my years anyway. I said, "Well, I'm not going to quit, and I'm not going to become a consultant. I'll be promoted laterally." So I ended up in the Plaza [Senate annex] on the sixth floor, with a desk and a phone and absolutely nothing to do. Another guy took my job. He didn't want it, was terrified of it, and got out of it as soon as he could.

It was a bad six months. Oh, I made work for myself. I kept myself busy, but on the 31st of December I retired. It was an awful

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thing to have happen after a nice career, to just dwindle away like that. I was very down for a long time. It was just an awful thing to end up that way. And there was no way I could fight it, you see. There was nobody who was going to back me. And the worst thing of all, in the process I discovered that Marjorie, having figured out I was a doomed man, had switched allegiances and become a spy for Jeanette, and was reporting everything I told her. This had been going on considerably earlier than this Homme affair, so everything I had told Marjorie since the beginning of the year probably had gone right to Jeanette. Oh, my God, you're doomed when you're in that position. There's no way out. I couldn't prove it, but I knew it. Awful, just awful.

**RITCHIE:** How do you figure someone like Harrison Williams?

**MCCLURE:** Weakest, most indecisive, charming man. I do not resent what happened to the degree

of disliking Harrison Williams. On the contrary, I like him very much. He 's a sweet man. I don't think he ever willfully hurt anyone, though he allowed many to be hurt in his name--too many, too many, too many--which is a terrible fault, and it's caused by weakness and willessness, and submission to some other power, namely in this case his mistress and later his wife. I don't know the secrets of his heart, but I do know that his behavior is that of a weak, indecisive man. He should never have been chairman of anything. He was a fine senator with just one vote

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and no responsibility over anybody else. Well, I think I told you in an earlier session how Andy Biemiller told him what the Labor agenda was and how Williams said, "Well, Stewart, you heard the word," or whatever. Good God!

**RITCHIE:** What impact did Williams have on the committee as chairman? You mentioned about the Kennedy subcommittee, were there other problems of the committee functioning with a weak chairman?

**MCCLURE:** It didn't appear while I was there, but I think it did later, that the chairmen of the subcommittees, realizing there was no firm hand, simply went off on their own. At one point--I had to stop it--they were even trying to print subcommittee reports on legislation, before they'd been reported from the full committee; the subcommittee would write a report. Well, that was stopped. But that sort of stuff. They could get away with anything. The staffs of the subcommittee just felt they were full committees and entitled to do anything they wanted, spend anything they wanted. While it wouldn't appear in a meeting--no one would criticize the chairman's performance--everybody knew the damn thing was not being run by anybody. It was just whoever had the guts to proceed in some direction went ahead and did it, and never was called to account.

I have no idea what any other senator on the committee thought of all this, I never asked them and they never said and probably never will. But I could sense at times, at the raised eyebrow or the

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look to the side at another senator, "Are we going to get anywhere here?" or "What is this?" Williams was a very able guy if properly briefed. He sounded good on the floor, in the committee, too. You

wrote notes to him and told him what was going to happen, and what should be said and done, here, there, and the other thing. He did it, beautifully. He was a public performer of quite some expertise and quality. He spoke well; he remembered what he was supposed to say. He was no dummy by any means. It was just in these situations where a chairman has to say "No" or "Go" or something, he never did.

**ITCHIE:** Did you get a sense that Senator Williams was taken up by wealth and status?

**MCCLURE:** No, not particularly, no. No, I don't think so. He was a playboy. He loved to drink and chase girls. His favorite subject of conversation was sports. I don't happen to care anything about sports, and it was rather difficult when I would get in a discussion in his office he would get raving about some basketball player and I never heard of him. I managed to just stay quiet. But he was nuts about sports: football games, baseball games, everything, followed them all avidly--much more than he followed public affairs. For him, life was fun, sport, drinking, carousing, girls. And being a young, in effect unmarried senator, he had his opportunity to party all over the place all the time. Well, Jeanette cut him back, of course, and circumscribed his activities to her

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interests. No, I don't think he had any ambitions for power or wealth or the high life or anything like that. He may have wanted more money, I suppose everybody does, but senators were beginning to be fairly well paid by the end of the '60s.

Poor guy, I really feel for him. He seems to keep up a terrific front. Everybody who runs into him finds him solid, and "we're still fighting," and "we're going to the Supreme Court." His spirit is very strong--well, he's right of course. In this instance he has good reason to be strong. He was railroaded and the Senate wouldn't believe it, and the courts don't believe it, but time and history will prove he was trapped. Sure he went along, he's a weak guy, and it must have been quite appealing, some of the offers made him. But he didn't do anything. He never got a nickel. He didn't take any bribe, there wasn't any there. The fact is, there's no crime been committed, honestly, nothing. This is sad to me, even though I have an awfully difficult time praising him as a senator--I don't--but as a man I think he's a fine guy and a darling friend, and I just don't like this sort of thing to be done to anybody. I think it's very dangerous when they start doing it to members of Congress. Well, I think we've pretty much wrapped up, unless you have some other questions.

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**RITCHIE:** I have a few general questions. Looking back over your whole career in the Senate, from 1949 to the end of 1973, how would you say that the institution of the Senate changed during the period you were here?

**MCCLURE:** The institution. What do you mean by that?

**RITCHIE:** Well, the Senate as a whole. Was it the same in 1973?

**MCCLURE:** No, of course not.

**RITCHIE:** What were the most noticeable differences?

**MCCLURE:** Well, I think first of all it changes every year. Not only the personnel changes, people are elected or defeated or resign or die and so on, there's a new crop of senators. And staff changes are compatible with that. There's been a general decline in the age of senators, when they're elected, that is. They come in younger and younger and younger. The old system of being a county official and a state legislator and a House member and then a senator, maybe a governor on the way, was the training of most senators in the past, and they were seasoned politicians and seasoned legislators, and quite old, in their fifties and early sixties when they became senators. I think in the past that was true. Nowadays, and increasingly since television came along, and a new form of campaigning, senators can be elected by their looks or by the exposure they have to the public on television, and by virtue of their renown in some other field than

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legislating or serving the public, such as movie actors and astronauts, and so forth, who know nothing about the Senate and public policy. Of course, there is a great leavening in that sense, many different kinds of backgrounds appear in the Senate. They're not all lawyers, they're not all practicing politicians. A lot of them never held office before. They're really green, new boys, and take quite a time to find out where they are. So what is this legislative body: it's the men in it, the people who work for it, and the people who are elected to it. So the change in the personality, the personnel of the Senate, determines the change in the Senate, it seems to me.

Now there have been some institutional changes, of course. Attempts to cut down on the number of committees, to cut down the tremendous burdens on each member--I think Javits once told me he was



on sixteen subcommittees, three of which were always meeting at the same time. They cut down on that. So there's been that kind of change. The Committee on Ethics has been established. They've pretty much held to the basic fifteen or sixteen standing committees, and changed the jurisdictional limits of many committees and readjusted fields of interest and concern. So many of them now are very broad: the environment involves everything and ten committees can legitimately say they have a role in it, as they do in the House.

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What else? I gather, though I haven't been subject to it, that the rules on the floor have been greatly changed so far as staff people are concerned. In our time you could wander on the floor no matter what was going on, sit down, listen to the debate, and nobody criticized you. Now, I believe, you have to have a bill from your committee up or your senator has to be on the floor, there has to be some real reason for you to be there. This was Senator [Robert] Byrd's innovation, and I suppose it's quite proper because I gather with the growth in staff that a great many young guys who had nothing else to do would just crowd the back of the chamber and talk with each other and drive senators crazy. I think he had to do it. In our time nobody opened his trap. If you were on the floor you may have whispered to your companion, but that was all. And you sat down in those deep leather sofas and were as inconspicuous as possible. That's the way I learned how the place ran was to spend the first six months of my work here sitting on the couch listening to the debate, learning all the rules. I suppose they can go over now and sit in the gallery and get the same education, not quite the same but it's probably pretty equal.

Well, of course, the whole security invasion so to speak, the attempt to protect the membership from bombs and assassins and so forth is all new and has given the police a much bigger role, and altered people's perceptions about what being a senator is. Are you

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a target of some murderer? And the sheer increase in staff, I've forgotten what the numbers are. Six thousand is it now?

**RITCHIE:** Closer to seven thousand.

**MCCLURE:** Incredible. You can't create a metropolis out of what has been a small barnyard without having thousands of events take place that wouldn't happen otherwise. So many people stumbling over each other, lining up for lunch, filling the rooms, committee rooms, and everything else. I walked by the Labor Committee one day a year ago in the afternoon; they were having a staff meeting. There were twenty-five guys and girls sitting around a table. A staff meeting! It was a mob. There is an enormous amount of make-work by the staff now, in order to justify its existence, think up new amendments and new laws and keep their senators busy, busy, busy, so they can justify their own jobs. You just can't help it, but that's certainly a big change.

There was an intimacy when I first came here; it was a very quiet place. You knew everybody. You could call anybody up and he knew who you were, even if you didn't know him personally. You could do business quickly with a few people around the Hill who had some power. It's gotten out of hand in many ways, I think. Now another building, and longer subway, and more guards, more people to fill the rooms--which, of course, as you know, are spread all over the Hill in these buildings here. I don't think the quality of legislation has

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improved any. In fact, the legislative process has become almost hopeless in some cases, with the budget structure and the struggle to get any appropriations. It's become an unwieldy institution. It was always designed to not do anything, to prevent rash action, but boy, I think it's just become almost unmoveable in some respects.

**RITCHIE:** We have another long series of reform proposals, this time former Senators Abe Ribicoff and James Pearson have been appointed to a special panel to study the Senate and propose reforms, and that's going to be coming up before the Rules Committee. Over your years here was there anything about the legislative process that you found particularly frustrating? And if you had the opportunity to institute reforms was there anything that you would have recommended that they change?

**MCCLURE:** I really can't think of anything particularly. Again it came down to people. Most of our frustrations with the Labor Committee occurred in the House Committee, which was run by Graham Barden for many years. As I pointed out earlier, we would pass marvelous legislation that would die in the House. You would go home at the end of the year having killed yourself and nothing would become law. But when that changed, when Mr. Barden went on to wherever he went, and Adam Powell became chairman, and then Carl Perkins, the committees worked together and things passed and became law. So it wasn't institutional obstacles so much as persons and their views.

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No, I wouldn't change seniority, I would not prevent filibusters. All the things that outside liberals frequently think are horrible have their reasons and there's nothing better, there's no substitute that's any good. Electing chairmen of committees is a disaster--everything is politicized then. At least seniority is a neutral law, which everybody observes and you proceed with that in mind. And filibusters, as we all know, are used by everybody from liberals to radicals to conservatives. I'm glad that they exist. It's a nuisance, it's offensive many times, and it's certainly annoying if you're trying to buck it, but we've been involved in liberal filibusters, too. So those typical criticisms you hear leveled, I don't agree with. I think basically the institution runs as it should, and it depends to an enormous degree on who are the senators. I think I'll have to stop there, I can't think of any rule changes of any importance.

**RITCHIE:** One other question: all those years you spent as a member of the staff and also as a staff director, observing other staff members, what really are the best qualities for a person to work as a member of the Senate staff? What were the type that you looked for, and what really works in a place like this?

**MCCLURE:** On the committee staff, where we're dealing with particular issues, you've got to have a man who knows what it's all about, an expert, someone who's demonstrated his ability and worked

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at his profession or trade long enough to qualify as a person who can be a professional staff member, and who can answer questions when asked by members about the subject at hand and the laws applying thereto, and the meaning of amendments that are being proposed, and changes, and so forth. Without that they can be the nicest guy in the world and friends with everybody, but they've got to know what they're talking about.

Beyond that, the second most important thing is to understand your leader, your chairman, your senator, what his needs are, what his interests are, what he can go with, what he cannot. There's nothing more stupid than to propose something to some senator which is going to be anathema to him, or murder him in his state. Nobody lasts very long who does that. But that's not easy to know. You have to study your chairman, your senator, know his state, know his history. That's the second major qualification.

The third is one that applies, I suppose, in any job involving people. You've got to get along, respect the other persons' needs and interests, try to figure out how to collaborate with them in the common interest. The least desirable is the backbiting, backstabbing, ambitious climber who tries to do in his fellows and succeeds in rising to the top of the heap by that method. There are

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always some around and they are the poison in the system. Sometimes they're very hard to get rid of, because they learn how to survive in the jungle.

There are plenty of other qualities, of course. It's good to be good with words up here. It's good to know how to write well, or at least intelligently, to explain your ideas and your position, and to do it in the name of a senator, if you're writing a speech, which everybody ends up doing somehow, sometime, and writing reports that mean something, that tell what the bill is about. That's a skill, all the communicative skills are good to have, but writing is especially good, especially useful.

What else? A willingness to work all night at some time in the year without putting up a fuss, because sometime in the year you won't do any work--at least that used to be the way it was. We had tremendous pushes where we just went day and night, and then it would stop. Well, you have to be able to do that and have a wife who will put up with it, once in a while anyway. And it used to be that certainly you weren't interested in money. Now I think it's quite different: they're probably overpaid. But for a long time this was no place to work if you wanted to make money.

Then, if you have a sense of theatre and enjoy the incredible number of scenes that are available to you at any day, this is an absolutely fabulous place to enjoy yourself, in your own committee or

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in other committees, or on the floor. It is a great scene, a great show, and I loved every minute of it--in fact, even the parts I didn't love. In the long run, it was a wonderful place to work.

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End of Interview #8

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

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