

**LEONARD WEISS**

**Staff Director of the Subcommittee on Energy, Nuclear Proliferation,  
and Federal Services;  
and Staff Director of the Committee on Governmental Affairs**

Oral History Interviews  
October 15, 2004, to December 21,  
2005

Senate Historical Office  
Washington, D.C.




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ORAL HISTORY PROJECT  
U.S. SENATE HISTORICAL OFFICE**

I, Leonard Weiss, wish to participate in the Oral History Project and understand that the recordings and transcripts of my interviews conducted from October 14, 2004, to December 21, 2005, are and will remain the property of the Senate Historical Office. Access to the completed interviews will be governed by the policies of the Senate Historical Office.


In entering into this agreement, I understand that all or portions of my oral history will be made publicly available to researchers and may be quoted from, published, or broadcast in any medium (consisting of all forms of print or electronic media, including the Internet or other emerging, future technologies that may be developed) that the Senate Historical Office may deem appropriate. I also approve the deposit of the recordings and transcripts at the Library of Congress, the National Archives, the Senate Library, and any other institution that the Senate Historical Office may deem appropriate.

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Leonard Weiss

Dated: 05/20/2017

I, Betty K. Koed, accept the interview of Leonard Weiss for inclusion into the Oral History Project of the U.S. Senate Historical Office.

  
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Betty K. Koed, U.S. Senate Historian

Dated: 5/26/2017



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## Preface

A one-year Congressional Fellowship with the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) brought Leonard Weiss to Capitol Hill in 1976 and set in motion a career on Senate staff that lasted for more than two decades and shaped major legislation in areas ranging from nuclear nonproliferation to civil service reform. He took to the Senate his expertise as a mathematician and engineer, and a concern for social and political reform.

Weiss's fellowship put him in the office of Senator John Glenn, an Ohio Democrat who had come to national prominence as the first American to circle the earth as an astronaut. On Senator Glenn's staff, Weiss devoted much of his attention to issues of nuclear proliferation, resulting in passage in 1976 of a Glenn amendment on the subject. The next year, Glenn became chairman of the newly constituted Senate Subcommittee on Energy, Nuclear Proliferation, and Federal Services and offered the post of subcommittee staff director to Weiss, who then resigned as a professor at the University of Maryland. Over the next two years, their collaboration resulted in the landmark Nuclear Non-Proliferation Act.

In his interviews, Leonard Weiss recalls his service on the subcommittee in the majority during Jimmy Carter's presidency and in the minority during Ronald Reagan's first six years in office, providing insights into how senators and staff operate from a minority position. When the congressional elections of 1986 returned Democrats to the majority, Senator Glenn became chairman of the Governmental Affairs Committee and made Weiss the staff director of the full committee. Weiss helped put together an ambitious legislative agenda for the committee, reinforcing Senator Glenn's reputation as "Mr. Checklist," who promulgated a long list of committee objectives. Although Weiss dealt more with managerial issues than he had at the subcommittee level, he continued to play an active role in the committee's legislative output, including reform of the Hatch Act and expansion of agency inspectors general.

Not all the issues Weiss faced were legislative, however. In 1984 Senator Glenn entered the primary race for the Democratic nomination for the presidency, losing to former Vice President Walter Mondale. In 1989 Glenn was one of five senators investigated by the Senate Ethics Committee for his connections with the banking entrepreneur Charles Keating. The committee exonerated him of all but poor judgment. In 1997 Senator Glenn served as the ranking Democrat on a highly divisive investigation of campaign financing that the Governmental Affairs Committee conducted under

Chairman Fred Thompson, a Republican from Tennessee. Weiss candidly recounts each of these turbulent events from his perspective on Glenn's staff and from his own ethical and political values.

Leonard Weiss was born in Brooklyn, New York, on March 14, 1934. He attended Brooklyn College and graduated with a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering from the City College of New York in 1956. He taught at C.C.N.Y. while working on his master's degree at Columbia University, and then went to Baltimore to earn a Ph.D. in engineering at the Johns Hopkins University in 1962. His work as a staff scientist at the Research Institute for Advance Studies led to his appointment as Associate Professor at Brown University. A Sloan Foundation Research Fellowship took him to the University of California at Berkeley. He then became professor of engineering at the University of Maryland from 1970 to 1977. During that period he also worked part time as a research mathematician for the Naval Research Laboratory in Washington.

After his IEEE fellowship in 1976, Weiss left his teaching career to become staff director of the Subcommittee on Energy, Nuclear Proliferation, and Federal Services, from 1977 to 1980, and minority staff director from 1981 to 1986. He then became staff director of the Governmental Affairs Committee, under John Glenn's chairmanship, from 1987 to 1994, and minority staff director of the committee from 1995 until Glenn retired from the Senate in 1999.

*About the Interviewer:* Donald A. Ritchie was a Senate historian from 1976 to 2015. A graduate of the City College of New York, he received his Ph.D. in history from the University of Maryland. His books include *James M. Landis: Dean of the Regulators* (Harvard University Press, 1980), *Press Gallery: Congress and the Washington Correspondents* (Harvard University Press, 1991), *The Oxford Guide to the United States Government* (Oxford University Press, 2001), *Reporting from Washington: The History of the Washington Press Corps* (Oxford University Press, 2005), *Electing FDR: The New Deal Campaign of 1932* (University Press of Kansas, 2007), and *The U.S. Congress: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2010). He served as president of the Oral History Association and of Oral History in the Mid-Atlantic Region (OHMAR), and received OHMAR's Forrest C. Pogue Award for distinguished contributions to the field of oral history.



## THE NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION ACT

Interview #1  
October 15, 2004

**DONALD RITCHIE:** I noticed that you came from New York, as I did, and I wondered what borough of New York you grew up in?

**LEONARD WEISS:** I'm a Brooklyn boy.

**RITCHIE:** Where about?

**WEISS:** Well, my parents moved around a lot. I was born in Coney Island, but we lived in an area called East Flatbush for many years. Most of my formal education took place in New York. I went to Brooklyn College for two years and then switched over to the City College of New York (CCNY), where I got my bachelor's degree in electrical engineering in 1956.

**RITCHIE:** I wanted to ask about your family. What did your family do?

**WEISS:** My father worked at a number of jobs during his working life, including driving a horse-drawn wagon for a laundry, but eventually ended up as a bookbinder. My parents were immigrants. They said they came from Russia (Cherkassy in one case, Kiev in the other), but whenever I've told Russians that my parents came from Russia, they say, "Well, exactly where?" And then when I tell them, they say, "That's not Russia, that's Ukraine." But among Jewish immigrants in those days such distinctions were not made. I think my mother arrived in the U.S. somewhere around 1912. My father came in 1910, or thereabouts. My mother never finished grade school. She attended night school for a while until poverty forced her to work in a sweatshop to help her family, so she was self-taught. But she could read and write both Yiddish and English. My father was pretty much self-taught also, although I think he had formal schooling up until the age of ten or twelve. But he was very well read. We had, I do remember, large numbers of books in the house. However, many of them were in either Yiddish or Hebrew, so they were not accessible to me. I still have a lot of them. Many more were lost over the years, because every time my parents made a move, books were lost. My parents were very poor, and my mother even received assistance from a Jewish welfare organization for a while. But things stabilized about the beginning of the Second World War, so we were then able to live in one place for the next 15 years, rather than continue living like urban nomads.

**RITCHIE:** You said he was a bookbinder. Did he work for a library?

**WEISS:** No, he worked for a small outfit in Manhattan. He bound books and made covers, that sort of stuff. The shop had a sideline also of making leather wallets, billfolds, and picture frames. He did not make much money, but fortunately in New York, the city colleges were free so I took full advantage of that.

**RITCHIE:** You started at Brooklyn College. Why was it that you switched to City?

**WEISS:** I had decided to go for an engineering degree, and there was no engineering school at Brooklyn College, so I switched to CCNY, which did have an engineering school. The reason I went into engineering in the first place was that in those days you could get a job after a bachelor's degree with no difficulty. If you went into the sciences generally, you needed to get a Ph.D.—especially if you wanted to teach at the university level. Teaching was a burning ambition of mine at the time, and in engineering, you could teach, at least at City College, with a bachelor's degree. And by the way, I did that. They hired me with a bachelor's degree right out of school to teach undergraduate classes in electrical engineering.

**RITCHIE:** At City College?

**WEISS:** At City College. I did that while I went for a master's degree at Columbia, part-time. As it turned out, after I got my master's degree at Columbia, I decided to go for a Ph.D. I ended up leaving New York and I went to Johns Hopkins, in Baltimore, where I got my Ph.D. in 1962.

**RITCHIE:** I was curious about your years at City College, because I went to City College beginning in 1963—

**WEISS:** Did you?

**RITCHIE:** Just a few years later. I've just finished a project editing all of Joseph McCarthy's closed hearings. City College's engineering department was one of his targets. Was there any kind of political atmosphere when you were there?

**WEISS:** Yes, there was to some extent, but it was somewhat muted while I was there. I was at City College from '53 to January of '56 as a student. I had good friends on the faculty, which was generally liberal, but with no identifiable political firebrands. There was a very popular fellow named Ben Minor who had been a member of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in Spain. He ended up leaving City College in order to avoid the wrath of the Rapp-Coudert Committee, which was doing investigations of what they called left-wing subversives in the New York City schools. Most of us considered the committee and its leaders as a bunch of clowns trampling on the constitutional rights of

good Americans in order to get a headline. There was certainly a lot of talk among people about politics, but it wasn't activist the way it had been in the '30s, and the way it became in the '60s. I was there at the time of the McCarthy period and also the Eisenhower years, when political apathy reigned among the general population, and much of the faculty as well.

I had belonged informally to a left-wing youth organization, which I got involved with actually at the age of 14, and I was somewhat active in it until I graduated from high school. Once I got into college my political activity really was cut down because my interest became focused on getting a degree.

**RITCHIE:** What was the group?

**WEISS:** The Young Progressives of America, which was formed as an adjunct to the Progressive Party, which of course was Henry Wallace's party at the time. In the 1948 election I was out there giving fliers to people and so on and so forth, even though I was only 14 years old. (laughs)

**RITCHIE:** I remember when I went to City College in '63, the first week that I was there one of the professors started his class by saying that the best advice that he could give to us was never sign a petition. I remember at the time being taken aback by it, but obviously he had been burned in the past for having signed a petition years earlier.

**WEISS:** Yes. Well, my activity consisted of giving out leaflets and fliers, and attending some meetings, so I never got into any kind of trouble with anybody. And I never formally signed up with any political group. I have clearances of all kinds, and I've always been truthful about what I belonged to, so there's been no problem.

**RITCHIE:** When you were in school, your field was electrical engineering?

**WEISS:** Well, it was electrical engineering, however my interests always tended toward the mathematical end of the field. I wasn't all that great in the laboratory, but I had a great feeling for the theoretical stuff. Remember, I went into engineering because one could get a job with a bachelor's degree. Otherwise, I probably would have become a physicist or a mathematician. By the time I got into my Ph.D. program, I was really working on applied mathematics, it wasn't really engineering at all. I had a professor, my thesis advisor, who was a wonderful man named Bill Huggins at Johns Hopkins, who also was theoretically inclined. He encouraged me to pursue my true interests, so my Ph.D. thesis is really a thesis in applied mathematics and not a thesis in engineering. In fact, I decided not to get the doctor of engineering degree that all Hopkins' engineers pursued in their doctoral program. I wanted a Ph.D. so they put together a special program committee for my thesis defense. I ended up being the first Hopkins Ph.D. in

engineering in the history of the school. The precedent resulted in the abolition of the Dr. Eng. degree some years later as more students wanted the Ph.D.

After I graduated, I got what amounted to a post-doc with an interesting organization in Baltimore called the Research Institute for Advanced Studies (RIAS), which was actually an adjunct of the Martin Company, but was administratively separate. The Martin Company had its headquarters in Denver at the time. They had a facility at Middle River in Maryland, and they had this facility, RIAS, which consisted of people doing nothing but theoretical work in mathematics, physics, biology, and metallurgy. They had absolutely no contact with anybody else in the Martin Company. This went on for a few years until the Martin Company got wise that there was this group of people in an ivory tower to which they were paying lots of money, and whose work had little to no relevance to anything the Martin Company was producing!

I got what amounted to a post-doc in the mathematics group at that place, and that's where I really got into my field, which ended up being systems and control. After two years there, the whole mathematics group left because the Martin Company was now pressuring people to do "real world" work, so we did what we should have done probably from the beginning, we went to a university. Brown University was interested in expanding its applied mathematics division. They had been working in continuum mechanics for many years and they had a group there, and they felt the field was somewhat tired at the time—in fact, it got rejuvenated a few years later. But at the time they thought things were kind of slow so they wanted to go in a new direction. I don't remember exactly how the connection was made. I think it was because of Solomon Lefschetz, who was a grand old man in mathematics and a consultant to our mathematics group at RIAS. He had a contact at Brown and told them about our group. So the chairman of the applied mathematics division came down, spoke to a lot of people among us, and lock, stock, and barrel the whole group went to Brown, with different levels of appointments, depending upon experience. So I became an assistant professor in the division of applied mathematics at Brown, and I also had a joint appointment with the division of engineering.

**RITCHIE:** What's the difference between being a staff scientist at a project like RIAS and being on a campus?

**WEISS:** There was no difference, except once I went to a campus I had to teach, whereas as a staff scientist at RIAS all I had to do was research. The research I was doing at Brown was exactly the same, but I now had some teaching responsibilities.

**RITCHIE:** I'm a total novice at all this, but when you say your field was systems and control mathematics, what exactly does that mean?

**WEISS:** Well, it meant that I worked on various kinds of differential equations, which could be used to model physical systems of various kinds, and the nature of the problems that I delved into had to do with how to characterize the properties of solutions to such equations (representing the state of a system) as a function of the changing values of an underlying independent variable (representing time). Such questions are related to the design of controllers to determine what kind of stimuli you should put into a physical system in order to have certain things happen. [Related problems involve the concept of stability in which the trajectories of solutions to a system of equations remain within certain finite numerical bounds. This arises in a physical system (say, a nuclear reactor) when one wants to ensure that] the system will behave in a stable manner if certain kinds of inputs are injected into it. Some of those problems could be modeled by the kinds of equations I was dealing with, but it was the abstract equations themselves I was dealing with and not the physical systems from which they were derived.

**RITCHIE:** It was a far cry from City College to Brown University, and also to Johns Hopkins. You really were in different environments completely when you left New York.

**WEISS:** Well, yes. The work I was doing at Hopkins was certainly different. First of all when I was at City College, I taught there. I graduated in '56, so I taught there from '56 until '59, when I got my master's at Columbia. My teaching load was 15 class hours per week! I was doing no research whatsoever. My classes met during the day. I was going to Columbia in the evening—sometimes my City College schedule allowed me to take a course during the day. But Johns Hopkins was the first place where I performed serious scientific research. It was a rather new experience for me, and I learned a great deal. I grew further as a scientist after I graduated and went to RIAS, where I had significant daily interaction with leaders in my field. By the time I left there to go to Brown, I felt I had arrived as a professional scientist. And it turned out that the kind of thinking I had to do, and the way I had to deal with people, actually was very good preparation for working on Capitol Hill. As a scientist you have to think logically and you have to think critically, and that is also the case when legislating on serious social and economic problems. If you don't bring that kind of mind set to it you can end up making serious mistakes.

**RITCHIE:** And I gather that applied sciences are more problem solving.

**WEISS:** Yes, but the work I did could only be called applied in the sense that the equations that I dealt with, the mathematics that I dealt with, described things that had some connection to the real world. But I wasn't doing applied work in the sense of finding practical solutions to practical problems. My work was strictly theoretical.

**RITCHIE:** Were you at this stage anticipating that you were going to spend a career as a college teacher?

**WEISS:** Yes, that was my aim, and that was my thought. I didn't waver from it. Then what happened was—(laughs) I don't know whether this was fortunate or unfortunate—this man Solomon Lefschetz, who I mentioned earlier, who by the way was a very famous mathematician, he had won just about every prize in the field of mathematics as a young man, he was now I think nearly 80 by the time I got to know him pretty well. He took me under his wing, and we spent a lot of time together. He did a very nice thing for me. He got me a research fellowship from the Sloan Foundation, This was a two-year fellowship, where I didn't have to do any teaching, just research. I spent the first year at Brown, just continuing what I was doing. Then I decided to go out of town for a year and go to another university and work there for a year, since I could go anywhere on that fellowship. So I went to the University of California at Berkeley and spent a year there in the electrical engineering and computer sciences department.

By the time that year was over, my daughter was ready for kindergarten, my son was no longer a toddler, and my wife—who had been a graduate student at Brown while I was working there—was now interested in getting some meaningful work. Providence [Rhode Island] at the time was economically depressed and, from our perspective a cultural backwater, except for Brown. It's changed, obviously, since then. I could have gone back to Brown, but the public school systems were terrible. We tried to get my daughter into a private school, but we were doing it long distance, we couldn't take an interview or anything, so they said no. My wife knew that there wasn't much there for her, but nonetheless we were ready to go back when the year was up.

I went to a conference to give a paper and I ran into someone I knew, not too well but I knew professionally, who had just been named chairman of the electrical engineering department at the University of Maryland. We went to lunch and he said he was interested in building up his department and would I be interested in coming there. I said I wasn't ready to leave Brown, I had been promoted to a tenured appointment there as an associate professor. He said, "Oh, well, we'll promote you. Why don't you come as a visitor for a year?" I said, "Well, I've just spent a year here at Cal, and I don't know whether Brown would like my staying away for another year, but I'll ask them and I'll find out." They said okay, one more year is fine. The Sloan fellowship was over, but now the University of Maryland was going to pick up my salary, with a substantial raise.

So I went to Maryland for a year and my wife was able to get a pretty good job at NIH [National Institutes of Health], and my daughter was in a public school that she liked very much. So I decided to leave Brown. The University of Maryland promoted me to full professor and gave me a joint appointment in Electrical Engineering and the Institute

for Fluid Dynamics and Applied Mathematics. I was quite young, only 34, to get promoted so quickly to full professor, but I left Brown with some regret. It wasn't an easy decision because I was going from an Ivy League school to a school that really didn't have much of a reputation, although it looked promising. I worked there for about eight years before changing careers and coming to Capitol Hill.

I arrived at the University of Maryland in '68 and I was there as a visitor until '69, when I became a full-time, permanent member of the faculty. I was there until '75 or '76, when I had a sabbatical coming up at Maryland. In the meantime, I was doing some consulting work at the Naval Research Laboratory. I became friends with a man named George Abraham, who was a high-level researcher at the Naval Research Lab. George was pursuing a Ph.D. at the University of Maryland in the electrical engineering department, so I saw him actually first at Maryland and then at NRL. I was talking to him one day and I said, "Gee, you know, I've got this sabbatical coming up and I don't know what to do with it because I can't leave town. My wife has this job she enjoys and she can't take a year off." He said, "If you're going to stay in town for a year without teaching, why don't you apply for a congressional fellowship." I didn't even know what it was. It turned out he was on a board for the IEEE [Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers] that dealt with these congressional fellowships. He said it would be a good thing, I would learn how the government works from the inside.

I've already mentioned that I had a longstanding interest in politics from when I was a teenager, so it looked like an interesting possibility. I applied for it and I got one of the two that were given out by the IEEE that year, and that's how my congressional career here started. I arrived on the Hill in January of '76. After a year I would normally have gone back to the university to discharge my obligations there, because I had taken a sabbatical, but I was enjoying working on the Hill and I wasn't ready to quit Maryland so I asked for another year of leave from Maryland, this time without pay, and they agreed. And at the end of that year I resigned, because I had now made some important legislative contributions and the opportunity to do much more looked great so I was ready to make a permanent commitment to Capitol Hill.

What had happened was that from '76 to '77 I was a congressional fellow and I spent it on [John] Glenn's personal staff. Then at the beginning of the next Congress, the 95<sup>th</sup>, he had enough seniority to chair a subcommittee and Abe Ribicoff was the chairman of the Governmental Affairs Committee—it was called Government Operations at the time—and Ribicoff liked Glenn very much. Glenn had an interest in nuclear proliferation issues, which I had worked on while I was a fellow in his office. So Ribicoff created a new subcommittee for Glenn, called Energy, Nuclear Proliferation, and Federal Services. Glenn became the chairman and made me the staff director, and that's how the whole thing started. The Democrats lost the Senate after the election of 1980, but Glenn stayed

on the subcommittee as ranking member, and I remained as the Democratic staff director. We had that subcommittee for about 10 years, until after the election of 1986, when the Democrats took the Senate back. At that point, Glenn became chairman of the Governmental Affairs Committee and I became the staff director of the full committee. I was there until I retired in 1999.

**RITCHIE:** Let me backtrack a little bit and talk about when you came to Maryland. By the way, I came to Maryland just about the same time that you did, to work on my Ph.D.

**WEISS:** In what field, history?

**RITCHIE:** Yes. I came to Maryland in '67 and got my Ph.D. in '75, so we were on the campus at the same time. One of the great advantages of the University of Maryland is that it's so close to the federal government.

**WEISS:** That's right.

**RITCHIE:** I would imagine that in the sciences in particular you must have felt a lot of connection between government projects and the university.

**WEISS:** I did not.

**RITCHIE:** Oh, no?

**WEISS:** No, in fact what absolutely amazed me about the University of Maryland at that time was how little connection there was between the university faculty and the federal government. You would have thought that it would have been a natural connection because of proximity, but in those days the connections were minimal, except for a few individual professors with agency contracts. Now there is a school for public policy so things are tied in a lot more than in those days. There was virtually no interest in politics in the department I was in at Maryland. At Brown people really were interested, and they were knowledgeable. And that was certainly true at Berkeley— (laughs) in a big way because I was there in 1967 and 1968, the time of Stop the Draft week and the special commencement during the height of the Vietnam War protests.

When I came to Maryland it was like I had fallen into a black hole with respect to politics. Many of the people on campus either didn't know anything or they didn't care. And also it was a very conservative campus, and the engineering departments were particularly conservative. I stuck out like a sore thumb when I arrived there, as a matter of fact, and people didn't like me very much because I was very outspoken and tried to organize people to protest the war. You remember there was the Vietnam War Moratorium, when there was going to be a day of teach-ins and that sort of thing. I tried



to organize one and I couldn't get a bite from anybody in the electrical engineering department, so I just participated with others elsewhere (laughs).

**RITCHIE:** I used to say that the humanities departments at Maryland could have been in Kansas for how close they were to Washington. There really wasn't any connection. But I just assumed that the sciences were much more connected.

**WEISS:** No, no. There was some connection involving a few people in the physics and math departments and one professor of economics that I knew, but not much beyond that that I was aware of. There was one peace activist who made a real—from the university's point of view—nuisance of himself. They ended up firing him ultimately on the grounds of his having been arrested for something, but his real crime in the eyes of the administration was going around with signs and picketing the administration. I recall giving him a substantial contribution to help pay his fines.

**RITCHIE:** How did you make the connection to the Naval Research Laboratory?

**WEISS:** That was also serendipitous. I had a good scientific reputation when I came to Maryland. I was invited to give lots of talks in different places, not only here but abroad, so I was pretty well known in my field. The Naval Research Lab had just started something they called the Mathematics Research Center, which was supposed to work on mathematics programs having to do with things that the navy was interested in. I got a call from a guy named Paul Richards, who I had met a couple of times at scientific meetings. I think at the time I first knew him he was working for a company like GE. They made him a division head at NRL and he was the one who started this Mathematics Research Center. He called me up and asked me if I was interested in joining it. I said, "I'm not interested in leaving Maryland but I'll be glad to act as a consultant." He said, "Fine, come on down and let's talk." And I did. We struck up a nice relationship and I consulted there at NRL for about seven years until I came to the Senate.

**RITCHIE:** What type of work would you do for the NRL?

**WEISS:** At the beginning it was research along the same lines as I was doing as a professor, but I could always find naval applications to talk about. The work itself was abstract, but the applications were myriad. You could find all kinds of things to which it would apply, such as controlling the propeller on a ship. There was always a control problem or a system problem that could be described by the equations that I worked on. Unfortunately, Richards ran into trouble with the NRL administration, and the Math Research Center was closed. But another division head named Sid Teitler was interested in having me consult for his group, so I ended up becoming a managerial consultant there for about the last year or two I was there. It didn't matter, I would have left in any case once I came to the Senate.

**RITCHIE:** Was it the kind of place where the navy would have problems that they would come to you with to ask you to address, or were these things that you were addressing on your own?

**WEISS:** Mainly, these were things that we were addressing on our own at the Mathematics Research Center. [As a managerial consultant with Teitler's group I worked on matters more tied in with the laboratory's mission, including improvement of its computational facilities.] I ended up meeting Allen Berman as a result. The Naval Lab has a military director and a civilian director, and Berman was the civilian director during the time I was consulting at NRL. I got to know him while I was at the lab, and that turned out to be interesting because I had another connection to him later when I was working in the Senate.

There was a famous event that took place on September 22, 1979, where the Vela satellites detected a flash in the southern Atlantic. The satellites were designed to detect the characteristic flash of a nuclear explosion, and they apparently detected such an event. When the news came out, it caused a sensation. The navy was in charge of trying to find hydro-acoustic information that might have corroborated whether in fact an explosion really had occurred, and Allen Berman was heading the analysis at NRL. Berman felt that the data showed that a nuclear test had occurred, but the government did not want to say that. To some extent that question is still open, although I would say the vast majority of people who have seriously looked at this question, including myself and most intelligence analysts, believe that it was a nuclear explosion.

It probably was carried out by Israel, possibly in cahoots with South Africa. Again, Berman came back with his data and he said that his data showed that there was a test. But the administration at the time did not want to say that a test had occurred, for various reasons. For one thing, it would have meant that somebody could pull off a test and the United States might not even know who it is, which would be an admission of a hole in our capability of detection and attribution. Secondly, if Israel was the culprit, that was a very serious foreign policy problem for the United States because we had all kinds of laws on the books about things that would happen to countries that exploded nuclear devices. So for various reasons they did not want to say that there was a nuclear explosion. They even went to the trouble of putting together a committee of fairly well-known people, gave them limited data, and said, "Tell us whether you think there was an explosion here." Based on the data they got, they said, "Well, we don't think it's an explosion." And they gave a possible alternative explanation, which was so farfetched that I laughed at it when I read it. Later on, I got to see the data myself, at least a plot of the data from the satellites, and it was a classic shape of what you get from a nuclear explosion.

Anyway, as I say I had always been fairly outspoken and I was perfectly willing to say that I thought a nuclear explosion had occurred. I guess I told some reporter somewhere and they decided that it would be nice to put me on camera and ask me whether I thought an explosion had taken place. I was perfectly willing to do that. CBS sent Robert Pierpoint over with a camera crew. Glenn's office at that time was located in the Hart Building. My office was located in the Dirksen Building. The camera crew was setting up in the Dirksen Building when I got a phone call. It was Glenn on the phone. He said, "Is it true that there is a crew setting up for an interview in your office?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Well, you need to come to my office. We need to talk about this." So I go over to Glenn's office and when I walked in it looked like I had walked into an execution chamber or something (laughs).

Glenn's press secretary was there, and so was his administrative assistant. Glenn was upset and said he got a call from the White House. He said, "They said that they heard you are about to give an interview about the mysterious flash. What are you going to say?" I said "I'm going to say that there was a nuclear test." He said, sharply, "You can't say that." So I said, "Well, I've got this crew in my office. Do you want me to just send them away?" His press secretary jumped in and said, "No, no, no, don't send them away. You'll have to go on, but you can't say that there was a test." Glenn then said something about his political enemies going after him if I gave the interview, so I said, "Okay." Well, I guess if I had been close to retirement at that time, I might have said this is what I believe and I'm going to say it. But I didn't want to lose my job, so I went back to my office and while I was walking back I was thinking: What on earth am I going to say? (laughs)

Pierpoint started off and he asked me, "There was this event on September 22, what do you think happened?" And I weaseled my way out of it. I said, "I really don't know, but just because a committee that has been set up by the White House says that nothing happened doesn't mean that everybody should just go to sleep." I had to say I didn't know what happened but I was trying to give a signal that I really did think something happened and it was a nuclear test. It went from there, and I indicated disdain for the report of the committee without saying that I thought that the alternative explanation, that there was a nuclear test, was the best explanation. That was the end of that. My interview was telecast by CBS News that night, on the last program for Walter Cronkite when he retired.

I have retained interest in the mysterious explosion ever since. At one point, I was heading to Florida for some R&R, so I called Allen Berman, who at that point had left the Naval Research Laboratory and was now working as a scientist at the University of Miami, at a marine biology laboratory. My wife's parents were living in Florida at the time, and we were going down to visit them once or twice a year. I called Alan from

Washington and said, “I’m planning to come to Florida, would you be available just to chat about a couple of things?” He said sure. So when I got down there I called and made an appointment, and went to see him, and talked about the mysterious flash. His reaction was really interesting. He was still—this was a few years after the event—he was still angry as hell about the way in which he felt he was treated by the administration, that they tried to discredit him because he wasn’t willing to go along with what he thought was the fiction that there was no test. He made it quite plain to me what he thought in terms of that event, and it coincided pretty much with my own views.

**RITCHIE:** This was the [Jimmy] Carter administration, right?

**WEISS:** Yes.

**RITCHIE:** It was a case in which the facts and the foreign policy didn’t jibe.

**WEISS:** Exactly. It’s not the first time that this has happened in American history and it certainly won’t be the last, but it has stuck in my craw for quite a long time. I remember going to a meeting at the State Department shortly after the September 22 event. The meeting included the same people who dealt with the mysterious flash, because it was a nuclear proliferation issue, and I was arguing with one of them, a senior official in the State Department, about what I thought was the truth about this. He said, “Oh, there’s General Keegan who is also saying it.” He apparently was considered somewhat flaky by a lot of people in the State Department. So he said, “Do you really want people to think you’re like Keegan and have your reputation destroyed? Because that’s what will happen if you go and say there was a test.” I didn’t think I was like Keegan, but that didn’t mean that he wasn’t telling the truth in this particular case. And their admonition didn’t stop me—but Glenn did.

**RITCHIE:** Can we go back to when you got that IEEE fellowship. You went up to Capitol Hill. How did that work? Did they just tell you to find someplace to work?

**WEISS:** Exactly. They send you a letter saying that you’ve been accepted into the fellowship program and it’s now up to you to make some appointments and go talk to some people and decide where you are going to spend the year. Let us know. You have to make a decision by a certain date. I think it was sometime in December of ’75, because the fellowship began in January of ’76. But where I worked was entirely up to me and the congressional office that would have me. I went to a couple of meetings where I met other fellows and received some guidance. This was, I think, the second or third year in which the fellowship was in existence. So there was a class of fellows who had come in earlier. I gathered some advice as to where the good places to go might be, that is, which senators or congressmen or committees were good places to spend a year. I took the opportunity to go and talk to people in both houses of Congress.

I tried to but I didn't get to talk to Hubert Humphrey, but I got to talk to his administrative assistant. That was another thing, I found out very quickly about office hierarchies. In some places you could talk to the member and in some places you could only talk to some staffer who had a high-level position. I decided early on I was not going to go to a place where I could only talk to a staffer. But I did talk to them. Among others, I talked to Dan Dreyfus, who was [Henry] Jackson's chief of staff on the Interior Committee—there was not yet an Energy Committee.

**RITCHIE:** There was the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy and then there was the Interior Committee.

**WEISS:** I didn't talk to the Joint Committee because I knew I didn't want to go there and I didn't like their policy orientation. I talked to Glenn, after talking to his legislative director. That was a very nice interview, and it sold me on him. I went for the interview because I wanted to meet John Glenn and not because I had any thought of working there, for various reasons including the fact that I didn't think my politics meshed sufficiently well with his. He was from my point of view a conservative Democrat from Ohio and I was a liberal Democrat originally from New York. I had strong views and I wasn't sure that would work. But I was bowled over by how friendly he was and how much he wanted me to come there. He really gave me a sales pitch. That was interesting because there were some other offices that I contacted and it was quite clear they weren't interested in me one whit, no matter what I could do for them.

That's what Dan Dreyfus warned me about, by the way. He said, "You'll go to some places and they will look at you and say to themselves: it's going to take this person three months to find out where the men's room is, and we're going to have to hold his hand for at least six months while he finds out how this place works, and by the time he's really ready to contribute something he's going to leave and go back to wherever he came from." And he was right. My perception of myself was, gee, I'm a scientist and I know all kinds of stuff (laughs), but from the point of view of some of those offices, I was useless. I went to [Walter] Mondale, I went to Humphrey, I don't think I went to Ted Kennedy's office, but I may have, I can't remember now. There was one other Democrat, it might have been Frank Church. I may have gone to Frank Church's office and talked to somebody there, but I didn't get to talk to Frank Church. Then I went to a couple of committees. I went to the Interior Committee. I went to the Commerce Committee on the Senate side, and that could have been an interesting place. And then on the House side, John Dingell had a powerful committee and his staff director was very interested in my coming there. Just for fun I went to talk to Bella Abzug, and I actually got to talk to Bella, which is a story in itself. I don't know if you want to hear it.

**RITCHIE:** Oh, sure.

**WEISS:** I made an appointment. When I called I spoke to her administrative assistant. She was very interested and she made an appointment for me to come and talk to Bella. So I show up at the appropriate time. I'm waiting in the outer office. Her administrative assistant's desk was in the same room where Bella's desk was. She comes out and says, "Well, Bella isn't here right now, she's in a hearing, but she's going to be coming soon if you could wait." I said, "All right, I'll wait." I must have waited 15 or 20 minutes and then all of a sudden Bella comes rushing in. I mean, I can see she's mad as hell. I don't know why. She comes running in, she opens the door to her office, she slams it behind her, and then I proceed to hear about five minutes of screaming at the top of her lungs at her administrative assistant. I couldn't make out the words, but I was thinking: What on earth could this woman have done to deserve this tirade? Then after five minutes the door opens again and Bella comes running out and she's gone. The administrative assistant apologizes. She looked ashen, by the way, and she's apologizing to me about Bella's behavior. She said, "I hope that you'll still consider our office and please make another appointment and come back." I said, "Well, let me think about this," and I left.

At that point, I had already made up my mind I was going to go with Glenn. But meanwhile I had left, as I did with other offices, a telephone number. We were visiting my wife's parents in New York at that point, and I had left that telephone number in case anybody wanted to contact me. The next day, I think it was a Saturday, the phone rings. My mother-in-law answers the phone and she says, "Bella Abzug is on the phone." Really? Okay, so I go and pick up the phone and yes, it's Bella Abzug, trying to soft soap me. She's giving me a sales pitch. I'm not sure I would have done it today, but I was really sort of full of myself at that point and I was really upset at the way she treated her administrative assistant. I knew she had this reputation of treating her staff not too well. So I decided to strike a blow for workers' freedom. I said to her, "Well, I've decided not to go with you. I've decided to go with John Glenn." "John Glenn!" she says. "We need you! He's not going to do anything. We're out there fighting for justice," and we need help.

I listened to this for a minute and I said, "Well, I have to tell you, Representative Abzug, the reason that I really decided not to go with you was because of the way you treat your staff." Well, I mean, it was like a volcano had erupted! (laughs) She starts to yell and then she started to cry. She said, "I'm out there, I'm fighting for all the good things in the world, and sometimes I have to be tough. I am tough on people. It isn't because I'm mean, it's because I'm just trying to do the right thing for the world." And then she berated me for not going with my political and liberal gut instinct, but doing something else instead. Finally, she calmed down and hung up without being unfriendly. It was an amazing experience!

**RITCHIE:** I've noticed over the years of watching members of Congress that there are a lot of people that I would be willing to vote for but I would never want to work for.

**WEISS:** Well, that's right. In fact, I once said to my wife, Sandra, after hearing stories or witnessing various things, "I don't know what it is, but there seems to be some correlation between how liberal a senator is and how badly he treats his staff." (laughs) Of course, that was a joke, but there was the reality of the existence of a couple of outstanding liberals who I just couldn't abide because of that. Now, there are conservatives who are the same way. I don't want to tar only liberals with the label of staff abuse. I guess I was so disappointed that people who shared my political outlook would treat underlings that way. I suppose I was pretty naive at the time, so I ascribed certain personal characteristics to people based upon their political beliefs, which I no longer do. It was part of my education in the Senate.

**RITCHIE:** By contrast, what kind of a person was John Glenn to work for?

**WEISS:** He was wonderful. No one is perfect, but Glenn was actually someone who it really was a pleasure to work for. He is even-tempered. That doesn't mean he doesn't get mad, but he keeps it under control. You know when he's mad, but he doesn't lose control of himself. He really does care about his staff people. If people weren't feeling well, or if there was something going wrong in their personal life, or whatever, he was always sympathetic. In my personal case, with few exceptions, he basically let me do what I wanted to do.

When I came to him originally, at that first interview as a fellow, he said, "What would you like to do?" I wasn't even prepared for that question from a senator, what would I like to do. I thought the senator would say, "Here is what I would want you to do if you come here." He said, "What would you like to do?" I thought, well, I don't want to limit myself, so I said, "I'm interested in energy. I'm interested in arms control and foreign policy, science and technology. I'm also interested in health care and transportation." (laughs) I'm just rattling off a whole bunch of things. I knew that if I got any one of those I would have been perfectly happy. At that time, Glenn was a freshman senator and had no subcommittees. He had a small staff. He said, "Well, if you come here, you can do work in all of those areas." I thought, I can't beat that, can I? It was at that point that I was pretty sure that's where I would end up.

Despite the fact that I had reservations about how compatible I would be with him politically, I thought to myself, I'm going to be there for a year, and it would be an interesting place to be for a year if I got to work on things that I really cared about. In fact, I left out one thing about the Abzug story that's relevant here, because before I spoke to her, I asked a couple of good friends who were activists on the left about what I

should do. They said to me, “Don’t go with a left-wing liberal. That person will do what you want without your being there. Go with somebody who you can influence.” I took that to heart, and so it made it a lot easier for me to say to John Glenn, “I’m coming,” especially since his legislative director had said to me that Glenn had not come with a hard view of politics, that he was a centrist, but he could be moved. I thought, okay, then it’s a challenge for me. If I believe something, can I get him to go with what I think is the right thing to do? And that’s the way it worked with him. I always tried to make my best case. Sometimes I won, sometimes I lost. But I was always treated with respect. He was just terrific.

**RITCHIE:** Given his background as a pilot and an astronaut, did you find that you could communicate with him on scientific issues?

**WEISS:** To some extent. You know, Glenn is not a scientist. There is a mistaken impression out there that if somebody has been an astronaut he really knows science. No, it doesn’t mean that. It means that he knows something about technology along a certain line. You have to be knowledgeable about a lot of things in order to be an astronaut, but you don’t have to know the deep scientific basis for the technology that you are dealing with when you’re in a capsule, or when you’re flying a plane. He was interested in science, but the level of his knowledge was more along the line of what you would find in *Popular Science* or *Popular Mechanics* rather than in scientific journals. But nonetheless he was interested in science and technology and he worked at his job. John Glenn was a hardworking senator. He always read whatever I gave him. He had questions and I would do my best to answer them. He was curious, and he learned. So as I say it was a pleasure to work for him.

**RITCHIE:** What did you spend most of your year as a fellow doing?

**WEISS:** I did a variety of things. I got into the nuclear nonproliferation business. I sort of started my Senate career with that. But I was doing energy policy, which meant that I was looking at bills that were coming to the floor and writing memos about how to vote on them. I worked on some education stuff, some science and technology stuff. I made an impassioned plea for him to vote against the SST [Supersonic Transport]. I wrote a 25-page memo, I recall, as to why he should reject the plane. All the other people in that office, the legislative aides [LAs], were all relatively experienced and they knew how things worked. They had already been working for him for about a year when I came along. So they knew you don’t give a senator a 25-page memo on *anything*.

In any case, every week Glenn would have a roundtable with all the LAs sitting around in his office and there would be a discussion of all the issues that would be coming up that week, and each one would get a chance to make his pitch, after having sent in a memo. I sent in this 25-pager and, as I say, I didn’t know at the time you weren’t



supposed to do that. You were supposed to do two pages at most (laughs). He took it quite seriously. He had a number of questions and I gave him the answers. I wrote a statement for him for the floor, which he modified. I had some effect. He didn't vote against the SST, but he said in his statement what the problems were with it. I was told by one of the other LAs after they read it in the *Congressional Record* the next day, they said, "You know, that was probably the best statement anyone could have gotten out of him on the SST." (laughs) It was a minor victory, but it gave me the confidence to push Glenn on issues, even on ones where I knew he might have strong feelings. Anyway, since I had come as a science fellow, all the issues involving science and technology and higher education were dumped in my lap. That was fine with me, even though it meant I had to answer correspondence from the occasional inventor of a device that on its face violated the first or second laws of thermodynamics.

**RITCHIE:** What was your impression of the Senate when you first came there as a fellow?

**WEISS:** When I first came I was a little bit in awe of the place because after all those years of some level of political interest or activism I was now in the corridors of power. Just walking down the hall of the Russell Building with the high ceilings and looking at the names on the doors on each side of the halls was thrilling. I knew all those names from the papers. I thought, what a fantastic place to be working in. But it wore off pretty quickly. Once I got into the business of how you make things happen, what you have to do to make things happen, and start dealing with people, including senators, on a personal, one-to-one basis, you find out they're just human, with all the faults and foibles that go with it. The extraordinary nature of the place is in the power that comes with the institution, but the people in it are so much smaller! My awe left fairly soon and I was pretty much in the swing of things within three or four months.

**RITCHIE:** In 1976 there was the [Stuart] Symington amendment [to the Foreign Assistance Act] on nuclear nonproliferation. Was that your introduction to the issue?

**WEISS:** Yes, it was part of my introduction to it. There was a hearing at the end of January on nuclear nonproliferation that Abe Ribicoff chaired. Glenn was there and I participated as a staffer in that hearing. I recall that Henry Kissinger came to testify. So that was my first exposure to the issue. The Symington amendment came later that year. I worked on that along with others. But I had an idea for extending it that became the Glenn amendment. Symington originally dealt with countries getting cut off from economic and military assistance if they import or export certain kinds of nuclear equipment for enrichment or reprocessing. Then Senator Jack Javits wanted to have something in there that said that if a country accepted safeguards then it's okay for them to import or export such equipment. I felt that nuclear safeguards at the time were

inadequate to deal with that kind of technology, so I pushed for a separate Glenn amendment that would say you can't import or export reprocessing equipment or technology regardless of whether it's safeguarded or not, and that amendment was accepted. So there was a Symington amendment and then there was a Glenn amendment, and now it's called Symington-Glenn. Then I also started getting into what became the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Act.

**RITCHIE:** There seemed to be a real change in general attitudes towards nuclear—not nuclear weapons but nuclear energy in that period. My father worked for Con Edison and had several offers to go up to work at their nuclear plant at Indian Head, on the Hudson. There was this idea that nuclear energy was benign and was going to solve all of our problems. That seemed to last through the 1960s but in the early 1970s there seemed to be a sense that maybe we needed to take another look at this.

**WEISS:** One of the things that caused the change was the explosion in India, their test of a nuclear device in 1974, because that was the first time that a country had tested a nuclear device where the materials came from what was supposed to be a civilian program. It caused a sharp rise in interest in the proliferation of nuclear weapons. There was always concern about it, that's why there was an NPT [Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons Treaty], and various other institutional arrangements, to try to protect against diversion of materials to weapons. But the extent of interest really took a quantum jump as a result of the India test. Then people started thinking about nuclear energy in a different light. That maybe civilian nuclear energy has some problems connected with it that we need to take another look at. The safety issue was being raised by environmental groups, but it was a little muted in terms of the amount of attention that was being given to it in the mainstream press. To me, the seminal event that changed that was when three GE nuclear engineers resigned their positions and made a public show of it. That was toward the end of 1976. They belonged to an organization that was sort of religio-philosophically based in California, and they felt that their company had been hiding safety-related problems or failed to address them.

These people had very good credentials. They were nuclear reactor designers. So their public resignations over safety issues made headlines. They got called before the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy, who attempted to rake them over the coals in a public hearing. But the Joint Committee overreached, and there was a backlash. Part of the problem was that there was a lot of resentment that had built up against the Joint Committee over a number of years, not just by anti-nuclear people but even by people on Capitol Hill who just didn't like the way the committee operated. They not only were assigned all the legislation dealing with nuclear matters, they also conferenced with themselves. Whenever a House-Senate conference was required on nuclear legislation, the Joint Committee simply conferenced with itself. There was no way that you could get

anything through that they didn't like. The end result, however, was that it was the Joint Committee that lost credibility with the public as a result of those hearings, while the engineers that resigned, in fact, rose in stature. There had been a lot of resentment that had built up against the Joint Committee, and I think those hearings were viewed as the last straw. The next year what happened? The Joint Committee was gone. It was reorganized out of existence.

The Atomic Energy Commission had been reorganized to create the Energy Research and Development Administration, ERDA, along with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission [NRC]. The fight over nuclear energy then shifted, because the fact of the matter is that although the reorganization was partly the result of the oil shock that had taken place a couple of years before, and partly as a result of the new emphasis on environmental protection, and the fact that the Atomic Energy Commission just wasn't seen as sufficiently friendly to environmental protection as opposed to nuclear promotion. The idea behind the NRC was to extract the regulatory division of the AEC and turn it into an independent agency, so you didn't have regulation and promotion in the same agency. The problem, of course, was that the same people were still doing the work. They had a certain institutional point of view about nuclear energy, so the regulatory aspect of it still wasn't really being treated as aggressively as it should have been. It's taken quite a few years for this to finally happen.

I think the NRC is a much better organization now that it was then, in terms of its institutional attitudes. But it's still a problem. However, I don't think their problem is more serious than that of other regulatory agencies. Whenever you have a regulatory agency where the people who work there are specialists, which you have to be in order to work at the NRC, they have no place to go if they leave the agency except to go to the industry they regulate. If you end up being what the industry considers to be unfriendly, you may not have a job to go to if you leave the agency. I think it's an unsolvable problem. You have to depend on having people with sterling enough character and intestinal fortitude to be able to resist the blandishments and threats of industry whenever a controversial regulatory issue comes up.

**RITCHIE:** This change in attitude that was going on, it's interesting that someone like Stuart Symington was involved in it. He had been known as a great hawk and a supporter of the military and energy establishments, but he seemed to have changed a lot because of the Vietnam War. Did you work with him at all in '76 on that amendment?

**WEISS:** No, I didn't have any direct contact with Symington. I had a lot of contact with Javits, but not Symington. Also, on nuclear issues, I had a lot of contact with

Chuck Percy on the Republican side, and with Frank Church, and of course with Abe Ribicoff and other members of the Government Operations Committee at the time.

**RITCHIE:** When this year of fellowship came to an end, you said you had to go back to Maryland. Did Glenn want you to stay? Did he make an offer?

**WEISS:** Yes. I more or less did stay. I only had two classes to teach, so I was coming back to the Hill and acting as an advisor to Glenn. Then when he picked up the subcommittee on energy and nuclear proliferation he made me the staff director. You see, classes at Maryland ended at the beginning of May. They didn't organize the Senate in '77 until late February or early March—it was very slow that year.

**RITCHIE:** Part of that was the committee reorganization.

**WEISS:** Yes, there was a committee reorganization that year, so the lateness of the start allowed me to do my work both at Maryland and on the Hill for two months with no trouble at all. The committee reorganization was prompted, in part, by the creation of the Department of Energy (DOE), which now incorporated ERDA and other energy-related executive branch departments.

**RITCHIE:** I was interested that the Senate just went through this big committee reorganization to reduce the number of committees, they abolished the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy, they created the Energy Committee, and then there's this subcommittee on nuclear proliferation created in the Government Ops. That seems contrary to the philosophy of the time of concentrating issues rather than spreading them out. Were there jurisdiction problems creating this subcommittee?

**WEISS:** Government Ops had been given the task of investigating the consequences of energy shortages following the oil shocks. So the committee officially had a jurisdictional interest in energy issues. Beyond that, I don't think there were jurisdictional problems creating the subcommittee because Ribicoff didn't have to go to other chairmen for permission to create a subcommittee. Also, the fact of the matter was that the oversight jurisdiction of the Government Operations Committee at the time was the universe. Now, in terms of legislative jurisdiction, obviously it is much narrower. But from an oversight perspective he could have created any subcommittee on any subject that he wanted to, and in this case, there was an established interest on the committee—Glenn had already done some work on it—and we had contributed to nuclear legislation already the year before. In addition, I was working with Percy's people on a bill that became the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Act, so there was all this nuclear-related activity going on in the committee and no one else was doing it. The Armed Services Committee wasn't doing anything on the nuclear issue. There was an Energy Committee that was forming, but they weren't doing any substantive work on the proliferation problem. So

the proliferation issue, in essence, was there for whoever wanted to pick it up, and Government Operations picked it up—later Governmental Affairs. There was a vacuum existing and we filled it.

So we established the subcommittee and the first bill the subcommittee worked on was the Non-Proliferation Act. We produced a comprehensive bill right at the beginning of that Congress. There had been a nuclear export bill that had been done in the previous Congress, but it didn't go anywhere. I was working with a young woman who worked for Percy, Connie Evans. We tossed out the old bill and produced a new bill that was introduced at the beginning of 1977, in the 95<sup>th</sup> Congress, and by April we were already holding hearings. We would have been able to hold hearings in March, but the Carter administration wasn't ready. We were pushing them, as a matter of fact. We tried to speed things up by telling them to just go with our bill, rather than introducing their own. Of course, they ended up producing their own bill, which I wasn't surprised at. The administration had just taken office two months before and wanted to show they had their own ideas on the issue. But in the end they basically had to deal with our bill.

Our subcommittee could deal with proliferation as an issue, but when it came to legislative jurisdiction, we obviously had to share it. We were lucky that Government Operations was one of the committees to which the Non-Proliferation Act was referred. At that time the parliamentarian could refer a bill to any number of committees and we lobbied him to give it to us. Now the rules have changed. The parliamentarian is supposed to refer a bill to only one committee except if he or she is ordered to do otherwise by Senate action. In any event, we ended up sharing the jurisdiction of the bill with the Foreign Relations Committee. The Energy Committee also got one section of it. I had written a section dealing with energy which was not necessarily nuclear, so at their request the parliamentarian decided that the Energy Committee should be able to mark up that section of the bill. So there were three committees that had to engage in a markup of the bill. I was Glenn's representative in Governmental Affairs at that point—the name of the Government Operations Committee was changed in that Congress—and I was his representative on the Foreign Relations Committee, because he was also on that committee at the time. So I was involved in both committee mark-ups on that bill. The markup in Governmental Affairs went smoothly. I was asked to present and explain the staff markup, and the senators approved the result in a unanimous vote.

The Foreign Relations Committee markup was more difficult. I was engaged in a fight with Frank Church's people. He had two staff members, a fellow named Ira Nordlicht and a fellow named Jerry Levinson. They were very pro-nuclear, perhaps partly because Frank Church had the Idaho National Engineering Laboratory as part of his constituency, a very pro-nuclear organization. There may have been another reason, which I will mention with a caveat that I'm only speculating.

Let me preface this by saying that in 1977 I was on a staff trip to France with Nordlicht and Levinson, and we got to know each other. I learned that they were very, very pro-Israel. The French, of course, were very pro-nuclear, and indeed the French gave the Israelis the bomb. One of the French nuclear officials we interviewed on that trip was Bertrand Goldschmidt who had been involved in French/Israeli nuclear cooperation. At the time of our visit, the French were pushing very hard, as were all pro-nuclear advocates, for the use of plutonium as a fuel. That was the ostensible nuclear future for everybody, and the French were very upset at the Carter administration because Carter had come into office as an opponent to the use of plutonium as a nuclear fuel for civilian reactors. Both Nordlicht and Levinson were passionately opposed to the Carter policy, and Levinson in particular was very outspoken about our policies in the Middle East, essentially linking the two things. It didn't take much of a leap to conclude that they saw the use of nuclear energy as a tool to wean America away from Arab oil, and perhaps if plutonium became a commodity of international commerce, enable Israel to build its nuclear weapons stockpile much faster. That was basically the issue on which we disagreed, and that disagreement showed up in the Senate report on the Non-Proliferation Act—I was up until 5 a.m. with Nordlicht writing one section of the Senate report. We couldn't get an agreement on the language. In the end, we ended up taking quotes made during the markup by senators on different sides of the issue. The result was cognitive dissonance within the report. And it didn't get fixed, because there was no conference.

Now, that's another story. Why was there no conference on a bill which in fact engendered a very great amount of controversy within the nuclear community? It was because I had learned enough about Senate procedure and House procedure to be able to play a procedural trick. We were having a devil of a time dealing with Senator [James] McClure, from the Energy Committee. He was a very strong pro-nuclear senator and very smart, and his staff was smart too. He had come up with a large number of amendments to the bill that he was going to present on the floor. I was working through and negotiating those amendments prior to the bill coming to the floor. I spent a good part of three weeks dealing with him and his staff guy, Chuck Trabandt, on those amendments. We were able to take a few of his amendments unaltered. On others, we were able to take them after modifications. And then there were a few amendments that would have gutted the bill, so we refused to take them. However, McClure agreed not to block the bill because of them. He said he would deal with them in the conference. We said fine. He agreed to let the bill come to the floor, didn't put a hold on it. The bill came to the floor, there were two days of debate, and it passed with the amendments that we had agreed to.

The House had passed a nonproliferation bill earlier, virtually without opposition. I forget what the vote was, but it's possible that no one voted against it. That bill had come to the Senate, but we weren't going to deal with it, and everyone assumed the real fight over a nonproliferation bill would be in the Senate because of the possibility of a

filibuster. The Senate bill was the Glenn-Percy bill. But we were talking to the sponsors of the House bill all along about what we were doing in the Senate because we wanted to prepare the groundwork for the House to act on whatever passed the Senate. We dealt with two House members in particular, one was Clement Zablocki and the other was Jonathan Bingham. Zablocki and Bingham's staff were in on everything we were doing, and even while we were on the floor, Connie Evans and I would go out into the hall somewhere and meet the two House staffers and talk to them about what we were doing.

Basically, we engineered a plot. We would pass the Senate bill, and in the euphoria generated by the passage of a major bill we would then innocently offer an amendment to simply take the House bill and strike all of its provisions and replace it with the content of the Senate bill and pass that. Nobody objected, so it passed by unanimous consent. The House bill, which now had the content of the Senate bill, went back to the House for action. Zablocki and Bingham had laid the groundwork for House action by telling Mike McCormick, who was the chief antagonist on the House side to any proliferation legislation that what the Senate had done was pretty much what the House had done earlier, so he didn't object to passing it by unanimous consent in the House. McCormick's consent was crucial—he had been on the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy, very pro-nuclear, and he was looked to by the industry and by other pro-nuclear members in the House as the lead person for anything dealing with nuclear matters. McCormick's agreement allowed the bill to pass, which meant there was no House-Senate conference.

If there had been a conference, I don't know if there would have been a decent Non-Proliferation Act. There might have been a Non-Proliferation Act, but it wouldn't have been this Non-Proliferation Act, it would have been a totally different bill, without many of the provisions which have turned out to be extremely important and are still in existence today. It's nice to be able to look back more than 25 years and know that a piece of work that you did is still having an effect, because until we did that bill there were no detailed criteria governing United States nuclear exports. And the criteria are tough. The recipient has to have safeguards on all its nuclear facilities, not just safeguards on the thing that was going to be exported. There had to be adequate physical security. The United States had to receive consent rights over any spent fuel that was produced in conjunction with the export so that the recipient couldn't reprocess it to obtain plutonium if we didn't want them to. There were all kinds of things in there. It was the second bill after the Glenn-Symington legislation to have a sanction for bad nuclear behavior. If you explode a nuclear device, you're not getting anything nuclear from the United States.

It also contains a provision, which unfortunately has never been implemented but which I still have great hopes for—I wanted to establish an energy for peace program. Not an Atoms for Peace program but an energy for peace program. I wrote this in the bill

as Title 5, which calls on the United States to engage with other countries in programs for meeting the energy needs of developing countries, with emphasis on non-nuclear energy sources to balance the Atoms for Peace program. But it was never adequately funded or implemented. I still think it's a very important idea.

I also wrote into the bill the notion of creating an international institution to guarantee nuclear fuel for countries that have reactors, provided they will not build any enrichment or reprocessing facilities. That's an idea which also did not get implemented from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Act—it's still there—but now because of Iran, people are talking about doing something like that. I'm convinced that nobody knows it's already in the act. The Iranians are trying to build an enrichment facility and we don't know what to do about it because we think they're going for the bomb, which is probably right. Some policymakers are saying, "We ought to guarantee that they can get low enriched nuclear fuel in return for not building the enrichment facility." Well, that is an idea that is in the Non-Proliferation Act that nobody's paid any attention to. But the bottom line is it turned out to be a very good bill, and I was very pleased to have worked on it.

**RITCHIE:** How involved was Senator Glenn in the whole process?

**WEISS:** Very. He was the floor manager for the bill on the Democratic side.

**RITCHIE:** Did he form an opinion because of this bill? In other words, was he just coming into this camp or had he already landed there?

**WEISS:** Glenn's views of nuclear power and nuclear energy evolved. Coming from the background that he had, there was every reason to believe that Glenn would be a very strong pro-nuclear advocate. And he was. Not as strong maybe as Jim McClure, but strong nevertheless. He thought nuclear power was a good thing. We were going to need energy in the future and nuclear was a good way to go. I kept trying to tell him that there are all these problems that have not been solved. It isn't that nuclear is inherently a bad thing, but that you still have problems with nuclear waste, and you have problems with nuclear safety, and you have problems with environmental degradation because of radiation. You have problems with exposure of workers who work in nuclear facilities. And you have the proliferation problem on top of everything else. So there are all these problems.

He was a little resistant to thinking of nuclear energy in terms of problems that had to be solved. Rather, he saw nuclear in terms of this wonderful technology that was there just waiting to be developed. He had great faith that the problems would be solved. Whereas my faith was not so great. Not that I thought they could never be solved, but I thought the solutions were not at hand at that point and it would be quite some time, and



until we got to the point where we could see what the solutions were, we really ought to exercise restraint in building all these facilities, especially in building them in countries that really had no current need for them.

He did a beautiful job floor managing the bill, though still harboring some concerns about whether nuclear energy development might be slowed down by it. Then a year later the Three Mile Island accident occurred. I think the Three Mile Island accident kind of shook him up. He was never that big an advocate again for nuclear once that happened. In retrospect, Three Mile Island turned out not to be a serious accident in terms of harm to public health, but from a psychological point of view it was a very serious accident, because the industry had told people that nothing like that could happen. It did happen, and the public realized that there was no credibility to the industry's pronouncements. Glenn's trust in the industry, like that of many others, vanished. Things then went from bad to worse for the industry. Records came to light of accidents that occurred in various other countries that basically had been hidden, in Britain, in France, in Italy, in Japan. So the credibility of the worldwide industry also tanked.

Then, of course, the economics of nuclear energy just turned out to be uncompetitive. Once government subsidies went down a bit, it was clear that there was no way that the industry really could sustain itself by selling reactors everywhere. They were just too expensive. They were not competitive with other forms of energy, and so the American industry doesn't build reactors anymore. They do make plenty of money, however, servicing what's already out there.

**RITCHIE:** It seems that the debate in the Senate got down to the science of nuclear protection and the issues of proliferation versus the foreign policy, the nations that were involved. A lot of the debate seemed to be: we can't afford to offend India, for instance.

**WEISS:** Right.

**RITCHIE:** We have to keep the Indians as our friends, even though their policies are putting us in a bind.

**WEISS:** That's exactly right. The thing is, I had some fairly unpleasant encounters when I was working on the Non-Proliferation Act with representatives of other countries, especially French and British nuclear people, including bureaucrats and industry representatives. I used to get into some serious arguments about various issues, not so much on the virtues or lack thereof of nuclear power but on the consequences of the legislation. Of course, the opponents of the bill turned out to be wrong. They were claiming that what we were trying to do was technology denial and that wouldn't work, and everybody was going to be using plutonium and we were trying to stop an

unstoppable force. That turned out to be wrong. There are some countries, of course, that are trying to use plutonium. The French have made money separating plutonium from spent fuel, and the Japanese are stockpiling it. But the reason the French have made it work is because they decided to produce as much nuclear energy as they could with nuclear power. They sell the surplus to other countries in Europe. And they got the Japanese to pay a major share of the costs of the reprocessing facility, by which the Japanese get plutonium back. So the sunk costs of the French for the back end of the fuel cycle haven't been that large, and by selling electricity to others they manage to keep their industry afloat. But nobody else has been able to do that. It's been a loser everywhere else.

As far as the Japanese are concerned, they are stockpiling plutonium partly because that's their nuclear deterrent. If they decide to make nuclear weapons, they'll have a ready-made supply of material with which to do it. As a result, I advised Glenn to oppose the U.S.-Japan nuclear agreement. Our opposition was based on provisions of the agreement that basically gave up the United States' right to object to the reprocessing of U.S. origin spent fuel. There is an interesting Capitol Hill sidebar to the story. Alan Cranston said that he was very much against the agreement, so I was working with Cranston's person to fight the agreement. Cranston was part of the Senate leadership at the time.

**RITCHIE:** He was the Democratic whip.

**WEISS:** He was the whip, yes, so he and [Robert C.] Byrd therefore were fairly close. I believe there was some kind of deal cooked up to pass the agreement. Cranston was torn to some extent because he had various constituencies in California that were pushing him to support this agreement, the whole foreign policy establishment wanted the agreement. On the other hand, he had taken a very vocal anti-nuclear stance over a period of time, and so it would be very hard for him to openly support such an agreement. In fact, he had announced that he was opposed to the agreement. We thought, okay, fine, we've got an ally, we'll go to the floor together, we'll round up our other allies and we'll all fight the agreement. I was told by Cranston's staff person that the agreement wouldn't come up right away, so ostensibly we had time. Now, under the rules as written in the Non-Proliferation Act, when an agreement comes to the Senate floor, it does so with a joint resolution that says that the Senate does or does not approve the agreement. In this case, the resolution used the "does not" formulation. That was the resolution that was going to be debated and voted on the floor, and we were told it wouldn't come up for at least the next three or four days. I thought I had plenty of time in which to prepare it. I was going to write a speech for Glenn.

I came to the office the next morning and I got a call informing me that the U.S.-Japan Agreement was coming to the floor within the next hour. I got on the phone and I called Cranston's person and I said, "What's going on?" He said there was a hole in the schedule and Majority Leader Byrd wanted to fill it with the Japan agreement. Then he said, "Don't worry. We've counted the votes and the agreement is going down." He assured me Cranston would be on the floor to help out. I protested but he said Byrd was going to bring it up and there was nothing we could do about it. I tried to talk to Byrd's staff, but they said it's too late, it's all been agreed to by the leadership on both sides, it's coming up. Then Cranston's person called and said Cranston had a meeting to go to and would miss the opening debate. So Glenn would have to floor manage for the opponents to the agreement. I went to Glenn and told him what was going on. He was mad as hell. But we went to the floor and while we're on the floor I'm writing out a statement for him in longhand (laughs). This had all the makings of a double cross to get the agreement approved, but I couldn't be sure because Cranston's person had assured me that the votes were there for us, and Cranston was the whip so he should know. He lied.

Here's another interesting aspect. Do you remember Dan Evans? He was the governor of Washington at one point and then he became a senator. He was also very highly pro-nuclear. The nuclear industry knew that this deal had been cooked up and they were prepared. Dan Evans came to the floor with a very long, detailed statement as to why this resolution to knock down the agreement should not be passed. Glenn had no statement yet, and Dan Evans said he was ready to speak. I said, "All right, let him speak and while he's speaking I'll write out a statement." Evans begins to speak, and he speaks, and he speaks, and with incredible detail, he gave me lots of time to write Glenn's statement, which I did. But at the same time that I'm writing it, I'm sort of amazed. Where did Dan Evans get this statement from? (laughs) Because I know he did not write this himself and it was so detailed technically that his staff didn't write it either. How did he know the agreement was coming up today? Then I found out afterwards it was written by Mark Rowden, who used to be a commissioner on the NRC and was now a nuclear energy lobbyist. It was a pretty good statement. Then Glenn made the statement that I had written.

First of all, as you know, it's unusual when a resolution comes to the floor to have an opponent of the resolution speak first. The person who speaks first should be the person who is in favor of the resolution that is on the floor. That would have been Glenn, because the resolution was one of disapproval of the agreement. We had no choice. I suppose Glenn could have tried to wing it, but it would have been too difficult for him. Nonetheless, we made a good showing. Cranston never did show up during the debate, God knows where he went, and we lost. The vote was something like 52-30. We got 30 votes, which was also the first time that an agreement for cooperation had passed the

Senate with so much opposition to it. Thirty votes in opposition was a lot on a nuclear agreement.

The point is: we made enough of a case so that 30 senators voted with us. And I am convinced that if we had had those three days that we were supposed to have, I am absolutely convinced that we could have defeated the agreement and forced another agreement to be written that wouldn't have had that objectionable provision in it. I never did find out how Dan Evans knew that the agreement was coming up that day, while we were left in the dark until the last moment.

**RITCHIE:** When the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Act passed in '78, did the Carter administration embrace it?

**WEISS:** Oh, yes. I spent the entire summer of '77 negotiating the bill with representatives of four agencies. I was negotiating with State, with ACDA [Arms Control and Disarmament Agency], with Energy, and the NRC. There were still a few outstanding issues left to negotiate going into the mark-ups that took place in the fall, but by the time the summer was over we had a bill that the Carter administration was likely to support. The support was not "wow, we're really behind this thing." There was a little bit of grudging acceptance to the support.

**RITCHIE:** Because it was going to complicate other foreign policy issues?

**WEISS:** Yes, exactly. They knew that they would have trouble with the Europeans in particular, because the bill called for a renegotiation of all nuclear agreements in order to give the United States the ability to say no on reprocessing requests. Now, our agreement with Euratom [European Atomic Energy Community] had no such provision in it. But our agreement with Japan did. So the Euratom people were screaming bloody murder and they said there was no way they were going to renegotiate that agreement. But the bill only called for an attempt to renegotiate. It didn't say that anything would happen if the negotiations failed. So the administration made a half-hearted attempt but they didn't like the fact that they were getting kicked by the Europeans every time a meeting would take place. In the end, because there was this rather stark difference in American nuclear policy toward the European community on the one hand and toward Japan on the other, a new Japan agreement was fashioned. They said, "The Europeans can reprocess to their hearts' content and get plutonium. The Japanese have to ask to permission each time." They wrote the agreement so the Japanese wouldn't have to ask permission each time, and that's what fueled our opposition to the Japanese agreement.

**RITCHIE:** Considering how current the issue of nonproliferation is right now—

**WEISS:** It's the same issue. The issue has not changed one whit. This issue will be around as long as long as nuclear weapons are around.

**RITCHIE:** In retrospect, it's surprising that the Senate and the House addressed the problem so early in the process.

**WEISS:** Ah, well, but that was because of the commitment of a small group of people. It's one of those things where a small group of people who recognize that there's an issue before it has come to full public attention via the media can make something happen. Ultimately, everybody came around, even the Europeans. In the beginning, the Europeans wouldn't follow our lead on requiring full scope safeguards as an export criterion. They wanted to be able to sell nuclear equipment to India. They wanted to be able to sell nuclear equipment to Pakistan, or anybody else that didn't have full-scope safeguards, meaning safeguards on all nuclear activities. But by the time of the first Gulf War they all came around. Nuclear cheating by Iraq convinced them that export requirements had to be tougher. So they agreed to adopt full-scope safeguards as an export requirement. But it took 13 years for that to be accepted.

**RITCHIE:** Well this has been a great start, and it's probably a good place for us to take a break.

**WEISS:** Fair enough.

### **End of the First Interview**



**President Jimmy Carter signs the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Act in the Roosevelt Room, White House, March 10, 1978.**

**Weiss meets President Jimmy Carter as Senator John Glenn (far right) looks on, Oval Office, April 3, 1980.**



**President Jimmy Carter signs the General Accounting Act in the Oval Office, April 3, 1980.**

## THE GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

### Interview #2

October 21, 2004

**DONALD RITCHIE:** We talked about the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Act and I wondered afterwards what impact being involved in passing that act had on you and your career. You became presumably identified with that act.

**LEONARD WEISS:** Yes, as a matter of fact there was a man named Richard Kennedy who was a member of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission when I met him. He was very much involved, from the NRC's point of view, in the bill. He was very pro-nuclear, and he had a lot of contacts within the nuclear industry. He was a retired military officer, although I don't know exactly how he got to the NRC. He may have been part of the nuclear navy for all I know. One day during the negotiations on the Non-Proliferation Act, he took me to lunch to offer me some fatherly advice, which was to this effect, and I think I'm quoting him exactly: "You know, Len, you are creating a little bit of a problem for yourself because the Non-Proliferation Act is being called within the nuclear community the Len Weiss bill." He wanted me to know that that was not a good thing for my career. I had many years of interaction with Richard Kennedy afterwards, because after he left the NRC he became the State Department's ambassador at large for nonproliferation during the [Ronald] Reagan administration.

I would interact with him when he would come to brief John Glenn about nuclear activities in other countries that were of concern to the U.S. His briefings were usually classified, and there were times when he would request that I leave the room when the briefings got to a certain level, but it didn't matter because his office was somewhat leaky, so I pretty much knew what he was going to say. I sometimes made a point before leaving the room of saying something like: "Well, if they're going to say this, that, or the other thing about the activities of (fill in the name of the proliferator), just keep in mind here's what's going on in that country," which I think always dismayed him, but it was my revenge for being asked to leave the room.

The Non-Proliferation Act did have an effect on my career in a couple of ways. First of all, it confirmed my desire to stay on the Hill as a second career. I came to the Hill in 1976 on a fellowship. I kept my professorship at the University of Maryland for the first two years that I was there until 1978. The act passed in February of '78. The signing ceremony was in the White House with Jimmy Carter in March. I resigned somewhere around July from my professorship at the University of Maryland. When that act passed, I came home and I told my wife, Sandra, that this was a lot more fun than

being a professor. It just made the transition very easy for me. So it had an effect in that respect.

The other way it had an effect was that Richard Kennedy's warning to me turned out to be prescient in many ways. I tried to get on the Nuclear Regulatory Commission as a commissioner during the [William "Bill" Jefferson] Clinton years and it just wouldn't happen, because the industry was so opposed to my nomination that there was no way I could get it. By the way, there was another aspect to that. I learned something about the process of getting nominated for a presidential appointment, and this doesn't reflect well on the Clinton administration at all. When I took an interview there—I had two interviews, one with a woman whose name I no longer remember but she was part of presidential personnel, and she was doing the nominations to the NRC. She interviewed me and she told me that I had given her the best interview of everybody they had interviewed, and I was feeling pretty good. Then it turned out she was in the process of getting another job and she left shortly afterwards. So I was re-interviewed weeks later by someone else, another woman, who told me, much to my surprise, that they had done some vetting in advance of this interview and they had been in touch with a company called Entergy. The Entergy Corporation was involved in various energy contracting projects with the federal government and apparently some of their people were involved in the vetting process for nominations involving energy, particularly nuclear. She told me that Entergy had canvassed various people connected to the nuclear industry and that those people had a lot of negative things to say about me. She was telling me that this was a black mark against me.

Well, I didn't say anything to her during the interview, but when I left I was seething, because I thought, here I am being interviewed for a job involving a regulatory agency and who did they go to to determine whether I was qualified but the industry that would be regulated. And because the industry that was going to be regulated obviously thought, based on my legislative activity, that I was going to be kind of tough, they wouldn't support my candidacy. That turned out to be enough to kill it. It was outrageous, but unfortunately I don't think the Clinton administration was unique in this respect. Based on observation, I think this is the way most regulatory appointments are made in both Democratic and Republican administrations, and it's one of the reasons why there are all these stories in the press about how various regulatory agencies, most recently the FTC [Federal Trade Commission], don't do their job. That was a rather low point for me (laughs).

So the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Act, just to come back to the original point, did have an impact on my career, and in other ways, too. It made my reputation among various public policy groups around the country. I was asked to speak at various meetings of one kind or another, and the nuclear industry, by the way, despite the fact that they



were opposed to everything that I was doing, used to invite me to give talks at their meetings. I suppose they wanted to hear, from their point of view, what the enemy was saying. The funny part is, I never really considered myself a hard-core enemy of the nuclear industry. While I was not particularly enamored of nuclear power as a source of energy per se, I had no ideological opposition to it. I only looked at it from a very practical point of view: Number one, was it economically competitive with other sources? Number two, what are the problems associated with using nuclear energy and are they solvable? Proliferation was one problem, safety was another, and there was the issue of nuclear waste disposal.

These were problems that had to be dealt with if there was going to be reliance on this rather unique technology. I gave voice to those problems in my work because there were policy decisions that had to be made regarding them, but the industry didn't want to hear anything about problems with the nuclear business, they only wanted to hear about the good stuff. From a policy perspective, it was important to focus on some of the negative aspects of nuclear energy, especially in the face of all the pro-nuclear propaganda being peddled by the industry and their allies on Capitol Hill. I felt that not enough attention was being paid to some of these problems that really needed to be addressed if nuclear was going to survive as an energy option. But I always felt that if there were adequate solutions found to those problems, then there was no reason to constrain the use of nuclear energy as an energy source.

**RITCHIE:** It seems that since that point the problems have just proliferated, with the whole Yucca Mountain issue—what do you do with the waste?—that's become an enormous political issue, as well as the international situation.

**WEISS:** Absolutely right. I said at the last session we had, that there was a very remarkable change that took place in public attitudes toward nuclear energy from the time I arrived on Capitol Hill in 1976 to let's say even just two or three years later. As a result, the industry is really in pretty bad shape. There hasn't been a new order for nuclear reactors, for example, since 1974 in the United States. I don't think there will be for some time in the future, although they have hopes that the global warming issue might bring the industry back. That could happen, but probably not in the next few years. It will be another decade, I suspect, before we begin to see an uptick in their fortunes. And much will depend on whether nuclear energy's competitive position on cost improves relative to other energy sources.

**RITCHIE:** Also security at nuclear plants has become a big issue in the last few years.

**WEISS:** Yes. Well, it was an issue all along. I initiated a number of studies and investigations about security issues at nuclear plants because we were concerned about it.

This was before terrorism became the thing that it has become since 9/11, but I recall planning and getting Glenn to hold a hearing on nuclear terrorism sometime in the '80s. There we thought about the possibility of small bands of people possibly coming in with automatic weapons and taking over a control room and causing an accident. We didn't think about somebody crashing a plane into a reactor building.

**RITCHIE:** Well, as you said, you came into the Senate as a fellow and got involved in the Glenn Amendment. You went onto his subcommittee staff and got involved in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Act, which was passed within the first two years that you were there, so you chose not to go back to the university. It's rare to have such a success so early in your career. What did you do after you passed this bill in 1978?

**WEISS:** Well, there was a lot of stuff that had to be done in terms of the follow-up. That law was such a monstrous effort and had such wide sweep that it created a need for reorganizing parts of the government in order to implement it. So for example new organizations were created within the executive branch, like the SNEC, which is the Subgroup on Nuclear Export Control. That was an interagency group that was formed in order to deal with the law's new requirements on nuclear exports. When an export application was filed there would be a lead agency that it went to, but all the other agencies that had some jurisdiction had to review it, according to the law. Sometimes there would be disagreement among the agencies as to whether an export would be good for the United States or not, in terms of its national security. When there was a disagreement among the agencies at a lower level, it would go to the SNEC for determination, and if the SNEC couldn't resolve it, it would go to the president's national security advisor. In general, the procedural requirements of the new law forced the executive branch to create new organizations to carry them out.

So oversight over that whole process was something that the subcommittee had to do. We held many oversight hearings on that. But we had lots of other things that we got involved in. To refresh my memory, I'll need to pull out my resume, because I wrote down on my resume all of the various kinds of legislation that I was personally involved in while I was working on the Governmental Affairs Committee.

**RITCHIE:** I don't have a complete resume but I have a short biographical statement here.

**WEISS:** No, the bio wouldn't tell you that. I'll look at my resume after we finish this interview, but there are some things I can mention off the top of my head. For example, we wrote legislation concerning the General Accounting Office, which is now called the Government Accountability Office (GAO). That was an important piece of legislation. First of all, there were certain kinds of nuts-and-bolts organizational matters that had to be taken care of, like the Controller General wanted to be able to retire with

full salary after 15 years. We took care of that in that, but that was the trivial part of the bill. The important part of the bill had to do with the interaction between the GAO and the executive branch agencies.

The GAO had morphed over many years from an accounting organization into a program review organization, examining how well government programs were working. They wrote reports which made various kinds of recommendations. But agencies didn't have to follow the recommendations. They could simply ignore the GAO or send letters back to the GAO saying why they disagreed with the GAO's review. But there were some recommendations that the GAO considered imperative to the success of a program or operation. So we gave the GAO the ability to flag those recommendations, and if the agency ignored the GAO, the GAO could send a special letter to the agency, and the letter required a response within seven days as to why the agency was not following this recommendation. The GAO was required to inform Congress that such a letter had been sent and a copy went to the appropriate committees. That exposure put additional pressure on the agency to follow the GAO's recommendation, because such letters were very rare, and when a letter would come to the committee saying that the agency has not followed this recommendation, which the GAO feels is critical, that would trigger a hearing. So that was in that bill.

The second thing that was in the bill resolved a 10-year ongoing fight between the GAO and the White House about the ability of the GAO to audit White House records concerning expenditures of appropriated funds. I was told that both sides had been negotiating it for 10 years without success. So I arranged for a meeting between the White House and the GAO, involving the general counsel of the GAO and the office of the counsel to the president at the White House, to basically sit down in a room and iron this out, and come to some kind of an agreement that they could each live with. I let them know, speaking for John Glenn, that he wanted a solution to this problem. There had to be a way for the GAO to be able to make sure that appropriated funds were not being inappropriately used by the White House. That meeting took place, and it resulted in an agreement, and that agreement was written into the GAO Act of 1980 and is still on the books today.

So we did the GAO Act, and it enhanced what was already a very good relationship with the GAO people. I felt that the GAO was a very important organization and was amazingly helpful in our oversight activities. And that was true of other congressional organizations as well. I wasn't used to having such resources available to me as a professor and a scientific researcher. I did my own work. In other words, if I had a research problem I was working on, there was nobody I could call on to do my research for me, I had to do it myself. When I first got to Capitol Hill, I continued in that mode, until I found out about these various organizations around the Capitol. There was the

Congressional Budget Office. There was the Congressional Research Service. There was the GAO. And there was at that time the OTA [Office of Technology Assessment]. I suddenly felt like a kid in a candy store! I said, my God, I can go to all these agencies and I can request information and generate reports and investigations via requests from my boss. And with few exceptions they snap to attention and say “yes, sir,” and they go ahead and do it.

I think I made more use of the GAO and CRS than most people at that time, especially the GAO because we had oversight responsibility of the GAO. They were very happy to have the work. At that time, the GAO was doing a lot of discretionary work internally generated. They also of course carried out jobs that were given to them by congressional offices via official requests. But when I arrived I think most of the work they were doing was discretionary. So they didn’t mind that I was tossing all this stuff at them, getting them to do various studies for us. After a few years, other offices caught on to the value of the GAO and the volume of congressional requests started going up. I can’t say our committee was responsible for it, but we certainly were early high volume generators and users of GAO reports. I think if you look at it today, the GAO has practically no discretionary work going on. Its work consists almost entirely of responding to congressional requests.

Some people on the Hill have complained occasionally about requested deadlines not being met by the GAO, but I never had a serious problem. I had a really happy relationship with the agency. And a former general counsel at the GAO once told me that they were very happy to work with me. I was also told that they felt they had to be on their toes in doing a job for me in certain areas because I knew as much about the subject as they did. On the nuclear issue in particular, I used to have a lot of back-and-forths with them about particular things they had put in a report that I felt did not really reflect the truth. And I was able to get draft reports changed in some cases.

**RITCHIE:** What was the quality of the work they did?

**WEISS:** Well, it varied. It wasn’t uniformly great. I would say that in general I found the quality good. It depended very much on who was assigned to do the work. Just like in any agency, you had a range of people with different talents. The more talented ones did really excellent work. I got to know those people and sometimes when I would send a request in, with John Glenn’s signature, I would call them and say, “I want this particular person to do this job, because I know the quality of that person’s work.”

Anyway, we made tremendous use of these agencies and as a result we generated huge amounts of studies, which led in some cases to legislation. We were players in a lot of different areas. We got into some aspects of healthcare, though always trying to fit it in within the context of the jurisdiction that we had. Since we had some aspects of the

nuclear jurisdiction, we could address the effects of radiation on people, and we extended our investigations to not just radiation due to nuclear weapons work or reactors, but radiation due to medical use of radiation devices, X-rays and so forth. We got into education. I wrote a couple of bills for Glenn on math and science education that he introduced, and we did a couple of hearings on that.

The Governmental Affairs Committee had created the Inspector General Act, in which I had a minor role. There were about 12 such offices in different agencies when Glenn became chairman of the committee in 1987. I had felt that there was a need for more inspectors general in the government, so that became one of our agenda items. I hired a couple of lawyers, Steve Ryan and Lorraine Lewis, who I thought would be excellent in doing investigations and studies in support of expanding the number of IGs. In particular, I wanted them to examine the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and other agencies that did not have an IG. I said to them, “I want you to go out and examine all the major agencies in the government plus the major regulatory agencies, find out how their programs get audited, if they get audited”—and I didn’t mean just in the economic sense but in the programmatic sense—“and see if having an independent IG would make the work of the agency better.” And they did. We ended up passing a major bill which expanded the number of IGs in the government. We more than doubled the number.

I thought it was a great thing at the time, and I still do, but since then—you know, there are always unintended consequences of anything you do, and there have been some unintended consequences of the IG Act which we passed, which I have had second thoughts about. It had to do with the intersection of the rise of investigative journalism with the fact that we were creating all these new agencies to deal with accountability issues in Congress. By the way, our staff also wrote the Congressional Accountability Act that for the first time subjected the Congress to many of the same regulatory laws that others had to obey. Anyway, we created all these new IGs, and spelled out their duties. After the bill became law, and the IGs were appointed, they did their job, they came out with lots of reports, they investigated various programs, and they found problems. So the investigative journalists who were interested would find out that the IGs had found these problems and there would be a headline in the paper the next day: this agency has been unable to account for billions of dollars, or this agency’s program for upgrading their computer facilities is wasteful and inefficient, etc. Sometimes the problems found by the IGs were critical, but sometimes they were minor and the distinction was frequently lost when the issue appeared in the press.

I think in the end we probably contributed to some extent to the decline in the trust of government, as a result of creating all these modes of accountability for government work. You can’t say, obviously, that because the journalism profession in America had taken a certain turn, that that was a reason not to push accountability in

government, but I was a little dismayed at the fact that trust in government was going down in America, at a time when there were so many problems where I felt you needed government to deal with them. In that sense, the creation of the IGs, along with this new “gotcha” element in journalism that grew up after the Watergate affair and after Vietnam, combined to make government work more difficult and played into the hands of the right wing that is always looking for ways of denigrating government. Nonetheless, if I had it to do all over again, I wouldn’t have done it any differently, because I felt these accountability issues really needed to be addressed.

**RITCHIE:** During the years when you were Glenn, from ’77 to ’80, Javits was the ranking member.

**WEISS:** Javits was the ranking member in the subcommittee that we had.

**RITCHIE:** Did that ensure a certain bipartisanship or were there partisan differences?

**WEISS:** No, there were no partisan differences. I worked very well with Javits’ people. There was a fellow named Gary Klein who was Javits’ minority staff director on the subcommittee. He and I really worked very well together. He was helpful with the Non-Proliferation Act at the time. But I was mostly working with this woman Connie Evans, who worked for Senator Percy, the ranking member on the full committee. Although the subcommittee took the lead in dealing with the bill, we were also doing it in conjunction with the full committee. It was all sort of one family in that respect. There really were no major disagreements among us.

**RITCHIE:** You also mentioned your end run around Senator McClure in avoiding that conference. Were there any repercussions from that with Senator McClure?

**WEISS:** He was actually somewhat admiring of the fact that we managed to do it, and so was his staff person, Chuck Trabandt. He was a very smart and personable guy. We didn’t agree on anything politically, but we got along very well. It was a case of their tipping their hat to us for having accomplished this political trick, which was perfectly legal in every way. We didn’t lie to McClure or otherwise say that we were going to do one thing and then pull a double cross. McClure had made an assumption that there was going to be a conference, and we didn’t say anything one way or the other. The fact of the matter was, he wasn’t on the floor to block our move. If there had been one person to object to the unanimous consent request to take the House bill and put the Senate language on it and pass it all over again, and then send that back to the House, one objection would have stopped that cold. It didn’t happen. If there was anybody who had a right to be miffed about this it would have been the Republicans on the House side, because I was told—since I was not there—that Mike McCormick had asked either

Clement Zablocki or Jonathan Bingham whether the bill that had come back to the House was pretty much in keeping with what the House had passed earlier. He was told that it was, even though it wasn't. So there should have been a problem over there, but McClure had no basis to complain. In fact, he sent me a very nice and complimentary note of congratulations two days before Carter signed the bill into law. I'm not sure that would happen in today's Senate.

**RITCHIE:** Well, everything was fine for you being in the majority and setting the agenda until the election of 1980, when very unexpectedly the Senate switched from Democratic control to Republican control

**WEISS:** That's right.

**RITCHIE:** You went from majority to minority. How did the world change when you found yourself on the minority side?

**WEISS:** It was unpleasant to say the least (laughs). There were a couple of things. First, it meant letting some people go, although we were able to place nearly all of them elsewhere. Also, office space became a problem overnight. The Senate had a shortage of space at the time because the Hart Office Building hadn't yet been built. I was unceremoniously dumped not only out of my office in the Dirksen Senate Office Building but thrown out across the street into the—what was it called?

**RITCHIE:** The Senate Courts? [an apartment house converted into offices]

**WEISS:** No, I had staff in Senate Courts, but there was a third building, the Carroll Arms apartments. I was given an office in Carroll Arms, up on the top floor, fourth or fifth floor. The building, if it hadn't been condemned at that point it should have been. I mean the floors were rickety and they were wavy. They creaked. And they were so unsupported that we were told we could not put a four-drawer file cabinet in any of those rooms. You could have a two-drawer, but not a four-drawer because it was too heavy for the floor to carry it. The other thing is that some of the offices, since they were apartments originally, like my office, had showers in them. Mine wasn't a working shower, but in some offices the showers worked so people bathed during the day in their offices (laughs). But we did our work. I had a couple of staff people in Senate Courts, so we used to walk back and forth whenever necessary. I was trying to remember who took over the subcommittee chairmanship at that time.

**RITCHIE:** Because Javits was defeated in a primary in '80.

**WEISS:** Yes, it was no longer Javits. I think it was Thad Cochran. Did he come in in 1981?

**RITCHIE:** He replaced Senator [James] Eastland, who retired in '79.

**WEISS:** Cochran did become the chairman of the subcommittee. He was a politician with the demeanor of a courtly southern gentleman. He was from Mississippi, and I'm originally from New York. I had certain visions of what politicians from Mississippi were like, because as I told you earlier I was very politically conscious at a young age, so I remembered Theodore Bilbo, not to mention James Eastland. James Eastland in some ways was a moderate when compared to Theodore Bilbo (laughs). So despite how nice somebody might be on the outside, I harbored some suspicions about politicians from Mississippi. But Cochran himself was a gentleman, although I certainly had no agreement with him on anything politically serious. His staff, on the other hand, was not so nice. His staff director took pleasure in baiting us from time to time, which I let slide off my back but I didn't particularly like them, and their attitude was a forerunner of the nasty partisanship that was to later take over the Senate. But Cochran himself was accommodating at the beginning.

We had planned some hearings before the election, and Cochran let us do one of them at Glenn's request after he took over the subcommittee. In fact, it had to do with an issue that was a local issue out in Ohio. I think it was a matter of senatorial courtesy and recognition of Glenn's standing despite his not being in the majority anymore. The senators are members of a club and they understand there are some things everyone has to do for their own constituents, and they weren't going to get in the way of that. But in terms of national policy, that was another matter.

Cochran had a staff member who had been a political science professor at one of the Mississippi schools, but his knowledge of nuclear energy and proliferation was abysmal. They adopted the nuclear industry line, which at the time was that the International Atomic Energy Agency was a great organization and if you're worried about proliferation the IAEA would take care of it. The safeguards system was all you needed. We did not agree. While we were supportive of the IAEA—in fact, Glenn had put in legislation to increase their budget, and we wanted to build the agency up—at the same time we were very concerned about the inability of the agency to really do what needed to be done in order to make sure that nuclear weapons were not clandestinely being built somewhere. We were critical about certain aspects of the way the agency did its business, in particular we wanted the agency to concentrate more on safeguards and less on promotion. But Cochran would have none of that. They just gave uncritical support to the IAEA because that was the industry line. The IAEA was basically a fairly toothless agency at the time. And the nuclear industry was perfectly happy with that because it didn't interfere in any way with anybody's nuclear business.



It wasn't until the Gulf War in 1991 that the agency finally started getting tough. It took all those years, and the traumatic discovery about finding that the Iraqis had a clandestine nuclear program even though they had signed the NPT, to bring the agency around. Prior to that the IAEA inspectors who had come to Iraq said everything was okay. So all of the things that we said were wrong with the agency were vindicated in 1991. Then the IAEA started closing some of those gaps. There is still a lot more to do, but it's a much better agency today than it was then. So we had a problem with Cochran. He was a promoter of the nuclear industry's interests and point of view.

There wasn't a lot we could do. We were the minority. We didn't set the agenda of the subcommittee anymore. So I began paying attention to my in-box and spending more time getting myself in good physical shape.

**RITCHIE:** How did you do that?

**WEISS:** I was a runner. I would go running early in the morning before coming to work. But it took so much out of me in the beginning that many of my mornings were totally useless (laughs). Since we couldn't hold any hearings our attention turned to oversight issues where we didn't have to depend on the Republican majority. That involved more time dealing with various kinds of constituent issues we were responsible for, and badgering various agencies in our oversight capacity. We wrote a lot of letters to various government agencies about things that they were doing that were wrong, and things they were not doing that we thought were important to do. We were getting Glenn to introduce bills for political and educational purposes, but which mostly didn't go anywhere. We also generated a number of GAO investigations concerning security breaches at the national labs. And, of course, I wrote lots of speeches for Glenn on nonproliferation, particularly on the problem of Pakistan's development of nuclear weapons, which was accelerating at the time.

**RITCHIE:** Did you detect much change between the way the Reagan administration dealt with nuclear nonproliferation issues than the way the Carter administration did?

**WEISS:** Well, yes and no. Let's put it this way, the Reagan administration *wanted* to make big changes to roll back Carter policy. They made some changes, but in the end there was a certain common sense factor that came in so it wasn't like they could go back and make things the way they were under the old AEC all over again. There were people in the Reagan administration who wanted to do that, but there was no way that could happen anymore. Three Mile Island had happened in '78 and there were other accidents that were coming to light that had happened in Great Britain and in France, so the public's trust in nuclear was dropping. But they brought in a guy who was going to be their chief nonproliferation policy person, a man named James Malone. He was given an

appointment in the State Department. I don't know if he ever worked for a company in the industry, but prior to his appointment he was working, I think, for a law firm that represented the industry. He was a well-known advocate of nuclear energy. They brought him in to deal with nonproliferation matters and he made some speeches that made one's hair stand on end. He made it sound like they were going to really bring back the old policies of laxity on the spread of nuclear technology and the production of plutonium for civilian purposes.

He ran into some difficulties, which we exploited, because of his previous nuclear connections. It involved some kind of ethics issue concerning a former client of his who was seeking contracts. In any case, Malone ultimately ended up not being much of a force. The bureaucracy in the State Department, which we were fighting with in the Carter years because they moved too slowly on nonproliferation, was now on our side. Although they were now working for Reagan, their inherent cautiousness and inertia acted as a stop to some of the things that the Reaganites wanted to do. So things got slowed down.

The administration then hired Richard Kennedy and gave him the title of ambassador at large for nuclear nonproliferation. Kennedy was supposed to be the nonproliferation czar, but it turned out that the thing that he liked most of all was to sign new agreements for nuclear cooperation. Under the Non-Proliferation Act, we had to review and if necessary try to renegotiate all those agreements in order to ensure that the United States had consent rights over the disposition and reprocessing of spent fuel that came from U.S.-origin uranium. That meant that the Euratom Agreement had to be renegotiated. Now, the Euratom folks did not want to renegotiate their agreement. Under their agreement, the U.S. didn't have any consent rights over, for example, the production of plutonium, and they wouldn't renegotiate it. The Carter administration brought in Gerard Smith, to do the negotiations. Smith was a well-known lawyer and arms controller who had negotiated the SALT I [Strategic Arms Limitations Treaty] agreement, among other things. He was a very famous man, and he had been involved in nuclear policy since the '50s. He said to John Glenn in my presence, he said, "John, you've given me an impossible task to do. The Europeans are just not going to agree to renegotiate this agreement." But Smith made an attempt. All the bill said was they had to try to renegotiate it. They tried and it didn't work.

The Japanese Agreement was a different matter because under the Japanese Agreement the U.S. did have consent rights, but the Japanese were chafing under it because they felt that they were no more prone to proliferate than any of the European countries, and therefore why should they be treated differently. The agreement was going to expire, so between the need to have a new Japan Agreement because of the expiration of the old one, and the Non-Proliferation Act, which said you had to give the U.S.

consent rights, it gave the Reagan administration a bit of a problem. Kennedy was the chief negotiator on the new Japan Agreement. I talked a little bit about this last week, but here's a detail I might not have told you. They ended up negotiating an agreement by which the U.S. was given the consent right, but gave it away in the agreement. That is, in the agreement the Japanese could reprocess U.S.-origin spent fuel to get the plutonium. But if the United States at any point felt that there was a problem with respect to the Japanese commitment to nonproliferation, the U.S. could step in and say no. Nobody ever thought the U.S. would ever step in and say no, unless the Japanese were going to announce that they were going to make nuclear weapons. So we fought the agreement and we lost, 52-30.

Coming back to when we were in the minority, I was spending a little bit more time dealing with some stuff that actually was more along the line of what the personal staff did. Since there wasn't a lot of subcommittee work going on, we did it to make ourselves useful if for no other reason. We just got more involved in some of the things that were going on on the floor. In other words, any issue that came to the floor, whether it was a subcommittee issue or not, that dealt with certain things that we had expertise in we would get involved with. So anything dealing with science and technology, anything dealing with science education, anything dealing even with environmental matters I got involved in. We got involved in all energy matters, whether it was a subcommittee issue or not. And of course I kept tabs on what was going on in those areas which the subcommittee had jurisdiction over.

For example, one of the things we had jurisdiction over was the Postal Service. At the time when Glenn first got that subcommittee in 1977, there was an old Senate Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, which was abolished. The jurisdiction of the Post Office and Civil Service Committee was given to the Governmental Affairs Committee. Our chairman, Abraham Ribicoff, could have presumably had a subcommittee called Post Office and Civil Service, but his staff convinced him that that would be a very bad idea, because one of the things they didn't like was that the Postal Service had very powerful unions, and Civil Service of course had the government unions. The feeling was that there were these various lobbyists representing those two groups that were wielding a considerable amount of influence on Capitol Hill. The government unions would support the postal unions and vice versa. I'm not quite sure exactly why that was a problem for Ribicoff, but his staff didn't like it. They thought they could break up that cabal by having Civil Service go to one subcommittee and the Postal Service go to another. At least the subcommittees wouldn't be bombarded by people from both sides on the same issue all the time. I don't think it really worked out that way myself, but was the theory behind it.

They had Civil Service go to one subcommittee, and Postal Service went to our subcommittee. So we had nuclear nonproliferation and we had the Postal Service.

**RITCHIE:** It conjures the image of postal workers going nuclear!

**WEISS:** Yes, and that reminds me of an amusing story. We had scheduled a hearing on a GAO report concerning nuclear proliferation, and invited Edward Teller as our main witness. The report was mailed to him, but he didn't get it prior to boarding his plane to come to Washington. So he began his testimony with a statement that said: "Mr. Chairman, unfortunately I did not receive the report I am to comment on, so I hope that after you solve the problem of nuclear proliferation you will deal with the much more difficult problem of the Postal Service."

Teller, by the way, had a great sense of humor, and contrary to his public persona as evil incarnate, he was a charming man. I was his host the day he testified, and we had lunch together in the Senate cafeteria, and discussed nuclear science. I gave him a reprint of one of my papers on stability theory and asked for a comment, but never heard back from him. I don't know whether that meant he didn't read it, didn't like it, or whether someone told him that from the nuclear industry's perspective *I* was evil incarnate.

Anyway, it was funny that our subcommittee had such a weird jurisdiction, mixing nuclear matters with the postal issue, but I kept my own hand in it. I never turned over an issue to somebody and kind of stepped back from it and said "I'm not interested in this, you handle it. Whatever you say I will do." I was used to working hard. I was able to process large amounts of information and keep it in my head. I had no trouble keeping up with issues that my staff were handling. When they would come in and talk to me about something, they didn't have to start from scratch and say, "Here's what we're doing." I knew the issue and I knew exactly what they were talking about. And I could suggest or demand courses of action based on my own reading of an issue complimented by the work of the staff.

I knew *nothing* about the Postal Service when we took over the issue, but I learned it pretty quickly, and that was an education for me in terms of Capitol Hill politics and lobbying. There was an enormous variety of lobbying styles corresponding to the variety of people who had issues with the Postal Service. There were the magazine publishers, the newspapers, and the non-profit organizations of all kinds, all of whom had interests in the Postal Service. Then there were the unions, the Letter Carriers Union, and the American Postal Workers Union, the two main unions of postal workers along the Mail Handlers Union. Then you had organizations which were associations of management within the Postal Service, the postal supervisors had their own organization, the postmasters had their own organization. You had all these organizations and they all were very well funded. The unions got dues; the supervisors gave money to their

organization; the postmasters gave money to their organization. And we're talking about a lot of people. Eight hundred thousand people were working in the Postal Service, it's a lot of people and therefore small amounts of dues can lead to large amounts of money.

The American Postal Workers Union had officers who were elected every three years and they had huge conventions. The Letter Carriers the same. I would get invited to these various meetings to give talks about postal issues, so I had to be up on the issues anyway, because I was getting invited to their meetings. In fact, they were my first introduction to the lavishness of the way in which Hill people are treated by people who have issues before the Congress. Our committee didn't do banking or finance, so we weren't players in those areas where big Wall Street money or the big manufacturers were interested. This was the closest that the Governmental Affairs Committee got to some sort of industry where there was considerable political money involved. From the point of view of political money, the unions were very important to the Democratic Party because they were big contributors. So invitations from these organizations were taken seriously.

I remember the first time I was invited to a big meeting. It was a combination of the magazine publishers and the unions, some kind of a conference in Florida. It was at a very fancy resort, and they gave me a very fancy room. I walked in there and looked at it and I said, "Oh, my God, postal workers are paying for this?" I was really appalled, frankly. Then when I closed the door, on the door was the cost of the room, or what they could charge. I don't remember what it was, but it was at least \$400 a night, and this was 20-some odd years ago. I had Sandy, my wife, with me, and one of the magazine reps said to both of us: "Feel free to go to the shops." There was a golf course connected to this resort. I'm not a golf player. "You can play golf, go to the shops, anything you want, just sign for it." I thought this is the way Capitol Hill works! (laughs) This is really appalling! I was totally turned off by this. But in the end I got sucked in. You get used to it. Within a few years, when a lobbyist took me to lunch, I didn't think twice about it. But I never let it influence my work, and in fact I would sometimes go out of my way to make sure I couldn't be accused of being influenced.

After we took over the full committee, a very nice fellow who I hired, who worked for me for a few years, named Tom Sisti, a really upstanding, wonderful guy—he was doing procurement issues for us because government procurement was one of the issues the Government Affairs Committee did. He was a very upstanding Catholic who believed in his faith, and believed in the Social Gospel. He began getting invitations from lobbyists, because government procurement is a big business, right? So Tom was going to lunch with lobbyists on K Street and he came to see me. He wanted to know the ethical guidelines. Was he supposed to pay for his lunch? I said to him—now this was like 1987 and I'd already been on Capitol Hill for more than 10 years—I said, "Tom, I'll tell you

what my guideline has become over the years. I was just like you when I first came. When a lobbyist tried to take me to lunch, I would take out my wallet and try to hand him some money for the bill and they wouldn't take it. I didn't feel good about it, but I let it go, and then after a while I stopped taking my wallet out." I said, "But here's the guideline: you can take their food, you can take their wine, and then you can go back to your office and if you feel they deserve it you can screw them." (laughs) He told me years later, "I never forgot that advice, and I followed it." What else do you want to talk about?

**RITCHIE:** In talking about the postal unions, it strikes me that one of the influences they had was that they were in every single congressional district and obviously had a tremendous amount of direct influence with each House member and each senator.

**WEISS:** Yes, and I was very aware of that. When they would have a convention in town, they would always arrange a meeting where they would invite staff people from the various committees and subcommittees that dealt with postal matters to come and speak. Now, certainly whenever there was an election coming up, whether it was a midterm election or a presidential election, they would have presentations made concerning postal issues. Generally, the presentations were polite, that is, the presenters weren't trying to be partisan. We would go and say what we were doing in terms of legislation on the issues. But I decided to break that mold when Clinton ran for office in '92. It was not too long before the election and there were Republican staff at the postal meeting. There was a guy named Wayne Schley, who worked for Ted Stevens, and there was a fellow whose name I've forgotten who was working for one of the House Republican members who dealt with postal matters, and there were a couple of Democrats as well. They got up and gave some presentations and everybody of course was trying to be friendly to the postal unions and the Postal Service generally, and by and large they were.

I mean, Stevens was always very protective of the postal service. I found that out in a very direct way by taking an official trip to Alaska for a hearing that he held up there. I discovered, as part of the trip, how important the postal service was to people who live in Alaska. I knew that the postal service would obviously have to be important in a place that's that far away up north and with all the conditions you have to live under there. But I hadn't realized that *everything* goes by Postal Service up there. Refrigerators are mailed! Everything goes by Postal Service. There is a special facility at an airport where they have washing machines and other appliances on pallets. A guy comes along and he actually puts stamps on it. It's an amazing operation! So despite the fact that Stevens is a conservative Republican, he was very supportive of the Postal Service and of the unions.

Okay, when it was my turn to speak I stood up there. I didn't have any notes or anything but I was looking at this rather large crowd of postal people, workers, and postmasters, and supervisors, and so forth, and I thought there's an election coming up. These folks are Democratic shock troops in some fashion. I got up and gave them a stemwinder about how important it was to get out there and elect Bill Clinton for president. (laughs) When I sat down, I looked in the faces of these Republican staffers and they had a look of total shock on their faces. They didn't expect it, and honestly I hadn't planned to do it, it just sort of came over me at the moment. This one fellow from the House, who I had occasion to run into in various times and on social occasions, always brought it up. Whenever he would see me he would tell whoever else was there this story about how everybody was trying to be bipartisan and I had gotten up and out of the blue made this shocker of a speech. (laughs) I did enjoy doing it.

**RITCHIE:** You raise the issue of presidential politics, and in 1984 Senator Glenn ran for president—

**WEISS:** Oh, yes.

**RITCHIE:** For the Democratic nomination. How did that affect his operations in the subcommittee and in his office?

**WEISS:** Well, the fact that we were minority meant that we had the time to be of help and could be supportive of whatever he was doing nationally, but we were not really that deeply involved in the campaign per se. We helped out with respect to writing position papers and speeches. I wrote some speeches for him, and I even rode with him on the campaign trail for two trips. I went up to New Hampshire during primary season and gave a talk on Glenn's position on the environment. And then there was another trip I took with him. In New Hampshire I went up by myself. I was with him when he went to Iowa, again during primary season. He was giving a talk at Council Bluffs, but I wrote the speech and it was about nuclear proliferation and how important an issue this was.

I learned something about what it was like to be on the campaign trail for that one day. It's informed my vision of it ever since. For example, we were in Des Moines and Glenn was scheduled to go to a coffee shop in the morning and talk to a couple of Iowans in this coffee shop. I went along with him. He walks into this coffee shop and there are at least a dozen reporters with cameras there. The café has a table in the center and he sits down at the table and the reporters are all around the table, although I could see what was happening. There were two Iowans sitting there who were going to ask him some questions and this is going to be recorded for posterity and for the campaign. But there were at least seven or eight other tables and booths in this place. I was looking around while this was going on at the center table, with the Klieg lights and everything, and these other people are all eating breakfast and they're paying absolutely no attention

whatsoever to this circus that was going on in their midst. They were already so jaded by the campaign! (laughs) It just blew my mind. That was an element of my political education as well as to how these primaries really work and how people think about them.

Then he was going to give this talk I had written for him. We went to the airport and got on his campaign plane that carried some reporters as well. On the plane, I was sitting next to one of the reporters and he started asking me about what Glenn was going to say. I think the communications people had said, “Don’t tell the reporters anything until Glenn gives his talk.” So I was trying not to say too much, but I said enough so that all of a sudden a crowd of reporters gathered around me and I was giving a press conference. (laughs) Elizabeth Drew was there in particular. They were asking me these questions and I’m doing my best to give them some answers that wouldn’t reveal too much. It was very funny. It was almost like being a candidate yourself, you let something slip and all of a sudden the dogs are upon you.

The speech didn’t get a rousing response when Glenn gave it. And that was the way the whole campaign went, pretty much. He did very poorly in the primary. Although he soldiered on after Iowa, his chances were pretty much gone after Iowa.

**ITCHIE:** I was surprised that he didn’t do better, given the fact that he was a popular figure and a centrist in his party. In person, I met him on a number of occasions and he was a very open, warm, gracious person who could make small talk with pretty much anybody under any circumstances, but his campaign never took off at all.

**WEISS:** No. Well, there were a number of reasons for it. One was that Glenn was a very poor manager. That was amazing to me. As a matter of fact, when I got to know him, when I came on the staff, I quickly realized that he just was a very poor manager. He didn’t like being a manager. He didn’t like managing his office. His chief of staff at the time was a fellow named Bill White, who helped him get elected in Ohio at a time when the Democratic Party in Ohio didn’t want him to run. He ran against their wishes. White was his chief of staff but White had no experience running a national campaign. Also, Glenn had a very ambitious secretary, a young woman named Kathy Prosser, who had a lot of street smarts and some organizational talent but the gaps in her cultural knowledge made one wonder if she had ever read a serious book in her life. He basically let them run the initial phases of his campaign, and they tried to elbow everyone else out.

I never developed sharp elbows on Capitol Hill, so if people didn’t want me to be on the inside it didn’t bother me particularly. They came to me when they needed expertise about something, writing a speech or whatever, but in terms of political strategy, no. So I was not that involved in the campaign, but what was apparent to me was that the people who were running it didn’t really know how to do it. They brought in



a bunch of political consultants, all of whom were like pigs coming to feed at the trough. The consultants spent huge amounts of money and gave Glenn nothing for it, because they believed the campaign was basically going nowhere, so for them it became a matter of: how much money can we make out of this? The result was a foregone conclusion.

Glenn adopted a strategy—now, I’m not in a position to say whether this was something that they told him to do and he did it, or whether it was his own idea. Glenn did have his own ideas about what would work on an audience. Sometimes the ideas were unbelievably wrong, but he had his own ideas. He ended up doing what someone on the staff said was a unique strategy for getting the Democratic nomination—running to the right of Ronald Reagan. Now, I saw this in action to some extent very early on. Glenn’s view always was—and this was how he got elected in Ohio—he would run as a conservative in Ohio but when he got to Washington his votes were relatively liberal, on social issues anyway. But he seemed to have no understanding that a Democratic candidate for president can’t run in a primary as a conservative and win.

When I came on his staff as a fellow in 1976, it was just a few months before the Democratic convention that nominated Jimmy Carter. Glenn was a candidate for vice president at the time. He was one of about five or six people who were vying to get the nomination for vice president. He didn’t have to campaign. He was a national hero and had great name recognition. And so there was a lot of talk about him. I remember that a number of Democratic senators thought he was going to be a shoo-in. He was on the Energy Committee at the time and I was staffing his Energy Committee work. There was a hearing coming up and I walked into the hearing room to sit in the back there, behind his chair. He hadn’t shown up yet, but a couple of senators walked in. One of them was Richard Stone, who was the senator from Florida at the time. Stone was talking to someone else. Maybe it was to Ribicoff or some other senator on the committee, and as they walked by me, Stone pointed to Glenn’s seat and said, “Ah, there’s the seat of the vice president.” (laughs) So a lot of people thought that Glenn might get that nomination. He still had the persona of a national hero, and some Democrats thought that would stand the party and the country in good stead in the wake of the disaster in Vietnam.

Glenn’s opportunity, it was thought, would be determined by his performance at the Democratic convention, because he was invited to give one of the two keynote addresses. I was involved in the keynote speech, and this was pretty heady for me, considering my low position on the staff. This was just a few months after I arrived as a congressional science fellow and they were asking me to help out with a major speech that was going to have an impact on Glenn’s career. I wrote a draft. That was the first political speech I had ever written. Glenn thought it was okay, but there were some references in it he thought needed to come out. They ended up with a speech that used very little of what I had written. They brought in people from outside to help out with it.

But then in the end Glenn himself did his own thing, and the speech was basically his own product. His confidence in his own speech making ability was misplaced, but stemmed from his earlier experience as a hero astronaut.

Glenn became a hero after coming back from his space flight and he got an invitation to address a Joint Session of Congress. He talked a number of times about that. It was a big event in his life. Because of the fact that he was so well received by Congress, he thought he knew how to write and deliver a good speech. So he rejected most of the advice he was getting for the keynote speech and ended up with his own edits to a committee-drafted address. One of the things that he didn't like about my draft was my references to Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal. He didn't want to put that in. At some point I was in a meeting where we talking about that, and the meeting broke up and I was walking past a fellow named Steve Avakian, who was Glenn's press secretary and had been with him since his winning campaign in Ohio. Steve was a liberal. I said, "Steve, I have news for you." For some reason Steve was busy with something else and he couldn't be at that particular meeting. "The man who wants to become vice president of the United States on the Democratic ticket does not want to quote Franklin D. Roosevelt." (laughs) Avakian looked at me and said, "Maybe he thinks if he doesn't get the Democratic nomination he can try the other side."

Glenn was a moderate Democrat, and his instinct was to run for office as a conservative. It worked very well for him as a senator from Ohio, but as a national candidate it just doesn't work. You've got to appeal to the base of the Democratic Party, which is liberal. He just found it very difficult to do that. He did much better the next time he was being considered for vice president, remember? People have forgotten that Glenn was being considered by [Michael] Dukakis. In the end it was between him and Lloyd Bentsen as to who would get that nomination. The only reason I think he didn't get it was because at that point Dukakis' people thought he'd been around too long and they felt Bentsen had more gravitas. At that point, the country's political center had shifted and Glenn was now considered a liberal. He came in as a conservative Democrat and as the Senate changed, relative to where the center of political gravity was in the Senate he was now considered more left than when he first came in, even though I don't think the record showed it particularly. So Bentsen got it. But Glenn gave a very good speech at the Democratic convention that year, which was much more like the speech he should have given the first time. If he had given that speech the first time, he might have gotten the nomination.

**RITCHIE:** Suppose he had gotten elected. What kind of a president do you think he would have been?

**WEISS:** He had a great deal of difficulty making decisions, and he agonized over the decisions he had to make, especially early in his tenure as a senator. As time went on he got a little easier about that. By the time of his fourth term it didn't matter so much to him anymore, but at the beginning it was like pulling teeth getting him to make decisions and be outspoken. If he had become president in '84, I'm not sure how good a president he would have been. A president's performance is, at least to some extent, dependent on the quality of the people he brings in as his senior advisors. I was very unsure about who Glenn would have brought in. He was very enamored of the people who helped him get to the Senate and he had a strong sense of loyalty. Presumably, if he had been elected, they would have had high-level policy positions within the government or in the White House, and that would have been, I think, a large mistake. But in the end there's no point in saying "what if," because the only way he could have become president was by jettisoning those people. And he wasn't willing to do that.

Some people on the left were concerned about a possible Glenn presidency because of his military background. And I had some concern about that when I first went to work for him. But I discovered that as a military man—he was in the Marines for 23 years—he was very careful about the notion of committing troops to military action. He had seen combat, and sending young men to fight and die was not something he would do lightly. I was very impressed with him in that sense. Every time the issue came up of the possible commitment of troops for some reason, he always brought up the issue of body bags. Everybody should know body bags are going to come back. He was a reluctant warrior, unlike many in Congress who had never served in the military or who served but never fought.

That brings up another issue. As a president I think he would have been very careful about foreign policy, and I think on domestic policy his instincts would have been humanitarian and more liberal. On fiscal matters he was a conservative. No question about that. I would have favored a more activist liberal president than he would have been. A Glenn presidency would have probably looked like the Eisenhower presidency. Possibly a bit more liberal on the domestic front, but with more turmoil within the White House staff.

**RITCHIE:** If he had made it, what job would you have wanted in a Glenn administration?

**WEISS:** Well, I was once accused, in jest, of trying to write one into that speech that he gave in Iowa. I had him call for what amounted to a nonproliferation czar who would work with the National Security Advisor but would raise the issue of nonproliferation to a higher level by having a separate position there. What's interesting about that is that now this is being called for. After 9/11 many are saying, "We really

ought to have somebody in there who worries about weapons of mass destruction separate from Condoleezza Rice.” So the issue has come back in a way.

**RITCHIE:** One memory that I have of Senator Glenn was the day I got on a public elevator in the Capitol, and he stepped on with us, rather than take the senators’ elevator. It was a small elevator and it was pretty crowded. A woman tourist said, “Oh, senator, this must remind you of your space capsule.” “Oh, no,” he replied, “my space capsule was a lot smaller than this.”

**WEISS:** Whenever I would accompany Senator Glenn in walking from the Senate Office Building to the Capitol for him to vote, he would be stopped any number of times by tourists, who were wandering around, to get his autograph. He always gave it. It was that way every time he stepped out in public. People would flock to him. I was initially surprised by it. Maybe I shouldn’t have been, but I was because after all, this was now 1976, almost 15 years after his flight. I no longer thought of him as a celebrity that people would run to to get an autograph from, but that’s the way it was. And it has been that way ever since.

**RITCHIE:** Well, there was that one day in which the country watched him, so I suppose that fixes itself on the collective memory.

**WEISS:** Yes, and it was reinforced when he went up again in ’98. I was one of the people who was flown down by NASA [National Aeronautics and Space Administration] to see the launch. There’s a bunch of stories about this, but I’ll just mention one thing. He had been trying to get this flight for some time. He used to make jokes about it whenever the administrator of NASA would come to Glenn’s office. I would sit in on those meetings because I was Glenn’s science advisor. At the end of every meeting, Glenn would say something about another flight. He would say, in what I thought was a joking manner, “Whenever you guys want to do a geriatric experiment, I’m your guy.” Ha, ha, ha, nice joke, but he repeated it a number of times. After a while, it wasn’t a joke, he was *serious* about this. He wanted that flight, and he really lobbied hard for it. He lobbied Clinton personally until Clinton gave in and told Dan Goldin [the director of NASA] that Glenn should get that flight.

When it became obvious that he was serious and he was lobbying, I remember talking about it to his chief of staff, who at that time was Mary Jane Veno, and I said, “I’m really concerned about this. I’m worried that he’s going to end up looking foolish,” this elderly man who’s looking to recapture this old bit of glory for himself. She said, “Well, this is something he really wants, and that’s it.” After the announcement was made, and I saw the public’s positive reaction to it, I went back to her and I said, “I was absolutely and totally wrong about this. I just can’t believe the reaction. It’s like 1962 all over again.”

**RITCHIE:** It was great publicity for NASA.

**WEISS:** Oh, of course. I think the concern they had was he might die as a result of the flight. They figured that if he survived it would be great publicity for them. If he were to die, God knows what might happen to them! He told me that was the reason that [John F.] Kennedy did not want to give him a second flight, because there was concern that he might die and then they'd have this national hero who they had killed as a result of giving him a second flight.

**RITCHIE:** Well, thank you, very much.

**End of the Second Interview**



## CAMPAIGN FINANCE AND OTHER INVESTIGATIONS

### Interview #3

October 28, 2004

**LEONARD WEISS:** There was one thing I wanted to correct. Somehow I skipped Chuck Percy as our counterpart on the Republican side. When Javits left the Senate, Percy became our Republican counterpart, and when Reagan became president and the Republicans took over the Senate, Percy became chairman not only of the full committee, but he also was chairman of our subcommittee.

That brings up a story because his staff changed. Connie Evans had left and his subcommittee staff were not very friendly to us. It was headed by a guy named Bill Strauss. Now Bill Strauss is known to some people in Washington as one of the founders of the Capitol Steps, which was kind of interesting because he really didn't give us any indication that he had any talent for writing parodies to popular songs. He turned out to be a right-wing conservative, which we were very surprised at because Percy, after all, was a moderate. These days he would be called a liberal Republican. But his staff was to the right of where he was on many issues, and Strauss was, I think, particularly over on that side. I was told by one of his people, after he left, that he used to go around saying that Len Weiss wanted to "communize" the whole world. That was his view of my politics.

The reason that I bring up the Capitol Steps is because Percy was beaten in an election, as you'll recall, by Paul Simon. The Capitol Steps began with a Christmas party that was put on by Percy's staff the year that he became the chairman of our subcommittee. That Christmas party produced the first Capitol Steps type of entertainment. There was a woman on Percy's staff named Elaina Newport, and she and Strauss were the ones who were the prime movers of this entertainment group. They liked doing it so much that they decided to try and make a living at it at some point. They were spending a lot of time honing their act, writing lyrics to popular songs with political themes and practicing, so they were frequently absent from their office. They were always out somewhere practicing these songs. Now, we had heard all of this. We knew all of this was going on, although we never said anything about it to anybody. But then when Percy lost the election, we decided, rather to our own amusement, that it was partly because these people, instead of working for Percy's reelection, were spending time trying to develop their act and writing new lyrics for popular songs. It was a very close election, so it could be said that Chuck Percy lost the election because of the Capitol Steps. (laughs)

Anyway, it was when he lost that Thad Cochran became the Republican chairman of our committee. I think I said something about Cochran and his staff the last time we spoke. Generally, the work we did in the subcommittee was quite serious, but there was one hearing that was highly amusing, when Cochran was chairman. He had a constituent who was, from my perspective, a scam artist, who had invented a device which converted mechanical energy to electrical energy, in essence a generator. And he was claiming that he was getting more energy out than he was putting in. Now, I'm a scientist, and I believe in both the first and second laws of thermodynamics. I knew there had to be something wrong with this scheme. But he was trying to get a patent from the U.S. Patent Office. This man was from Mississippi, and he was making lots of money from this scam because he was putting on demonstrations all over the South where people were paying money to come and see this wondrous device. The Patent Office was dragging its feet, so he leaned on Thad Cochran to force the Patent Office to give him a patent.

Cochran apparently couldn't get the Patent Office to do anything, or maybe he recognized that there was something untoward about this. So instead he agreed to give this guy a hearing. Our subcommittee had jurisdiction over the Patent Office. I talked to Glenn about it. I looked at the papers provided to us and I said, "This is obviously a scam." I couldn't quite figure out where the error was, but there was clearly an error in the analysis. Cochran wanted the hearing, we couldn't say no, but I said to Glenn, "We have to have a response to this." I suggested that we send the patent application and the design over to the National Institute of Science and Technology and have them do an analysis of it, which we did. They came up with an analysis which said that basically this is a violation of the second law of thermodynamics and therefore it's worthless.

So we told Cochran we wanted NIST [National Institute of Standards and Technology] to testify at the hearing as well, and he agreed. Apparently, Cochran's staff told their witness that all of this negative stuff about his invention was being generated by the work that I was doing for Glenn. So he came and made some statement about my involvement—I forget how he characterized it, but he mentioned the fact that I was an electrical engineer, but said it in a very negative way. (laughs) In any case, we had the hearing. The testimony destroyed his credibility and the credibility of his invention. We never heard from him again. I think Cochran was actually rather pleased that we had done what we did, because I don't think he really wanted to get more involved than he already was. He wanted to do a favor for his constituent, but he certainly didn't want it to be an on-going thing. So in fact we did him a favor.

**DONALD RITCHIE:** I wanted to ask another question about the early 1980s. There's been a lot in the newspapers lately, because of Paul Nitze's death, about the Reagan administration's nuclear policy, and about people changing their minds about nuclear policy during the '80s. Nitze had been a hard-liner before but began talking about



abolishing nuclear weapons, and Reagan and [Mikhail] Gorbachev's meeting in Iceland. Were you surprised at some of these things as they developed in the '80s?

**WEISS:** Well, I was not particularly happy with the Reagan administration. Certainly with respect to arms control they were pretty terrible. In the end, of course, people are giving Reagan a lot of credit for helping to end the Cold War, but I think he got a lot more credit than he probably deserved. The fact of the matter is that the Soviet Union had begun failing before Reagan came on the scene, and it was really Mikhail Gorbachev who accelerated the demise of the Soviet Union and who deserves the credit for what happened to end the Cold War. Gorbachev came in and really understood that the system was crumbling and that he had to do something to try to save it. What he tried to do ended up accelerating the collapse, but the result was inevitable. To what extent did Reagan contribute to it? Well, I suppose he contributed by making it clear that the United States wasn't going to do anything that was going to take the pressure off the Soviet Union. He kept the pressure on and perhaps even increased it a bit by increasing the amount of spending for defense. But in the end, our intelligence agencies had gotten the Soviet Union all wrong with respect to the strength of their system and their intentions.

Daniel Patrick Moynihan had the right take on it. He, I think, was pretty consistent in saying that he thought the system was going to collapse. He didn't know when, but he was very skeptical of the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] reports that were being made at the time indicating that the system was getting stronger. Now, as to Reagan's wanting to get rid of nuclear weapons, I will give Reagan this amount of praise: I think he was sincere about wanting to get rid of nuclear weapons. But he was very naive if he really thought that he could ignore his advisors and achieve it simply by going to Reykavik and signing a piece of paper with Gorbachev. He had Richard Perle there as his advisor and other people of that ilk, and I think he put a major scare into them because of some things that he said at the meeting. But it was predictable that the end result would be that we wouldn't really budge very much and we would continue an arms buildup.

There was another thing about Reagan, which I think is reflected by the policies of the current Bush administration. They are carrying out an idea which started in the Reagan administration. The Reaganites came in with the notion that they would cut taxes, which they did, and that the cutting of taxes and the reduction of revenue to the federal government would force the federal government to cut back on programs, particularly entitlements, which were anathema to Republicans. I think that Reagan's OMB [Office of Management and Budget] director—I've forgotten who that was.

**RITCHIE:** First it was [David] Stockman and then [James] Miller.

**WEISS:** It was David Stockman. You remember that Stockman had this conversation with people including a journalist, William Greider, in which he admitted

that they knew they were going to end up with these huge deficits as far as they eye could see at that time, and they would have to do something about it. Stockman wanted to cut spending to match the tax cuts, but he couldn't because the lobbyists were too strong. He called them pigs feeding at the trough. The end result was that government spending really didn't go down under Reagan. Social programs were cut, but defense programs went way up. The end result was actually an increase in government spending, while government revenues were going down. So we had these huge deficits that didn't get fixed until Clinton came in with a program of raising taxes, among other things.

The philosophy behind the Republican drive when Reagan came in was: force the federal government to cut back because they won't have the money to do what the liberals want to do. I think that philosophy is at work now. I think that's really what you're seeing with the George W. Bush administration. The idea, the strategy, goes back to Reagan.

**RITCHIE:** You mentioned Senator Moynihan and the Soviet Union. I always thought that one of his advantages over the CIA was that he was an academic. Anybody who had ever talked to any scholar or graduate student who had ever spent any time in Moscow always came back saying that the place was falling apart, especially the dormitories they had to stay in! The infrastructure was a terrible mess, but somehow the intelligence agents always overestimated how strong they were. Every graduate student I used to talk to in the '70s would tell me how awful it was to live in Moscow.

**WEISS:** Right. You mentioned Paul Nitze to begin with. This was the problem. You had people like Nitze and various other folks belonging to an organization called the Committee on the Present Danger whose careers were tied up with thinking of the Soviet Union as this growing menace that needed to be dealt with, and at every opportunity they always took the task that the Soviet Union was becoming more aggressive and more dangerous, even though the peak had actually been reached many years before.

My own view about this is that the Soviet Union was really dangerous up until the time that Stalin died. What happened was that after Stalin's death, the Soviet Union actually changed and they didn't get any recognition for it in the West. The fact of the matter is that although there was the gulag that Stalin had created, the midnight knock on the door and disappearance of people that was a feature of the gulag under Stalin really more or less disappeared. It didn't mean that the Soviet Union was not a repressive society, but the terror that characterized Stalin's rule no longer existed. Also, while the Soviets would do whatever they could to hold on to the territories they controlled after World War II, the notion that they could take over Western Europe by military force was fanciful by the time NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] was established.

We almost did have nuclear war later, but that was because the United States couldn't tolerate the Soviets doing something that the Soviets were forced to tolerate when we did it, which was to put missiles within range of major cities. The fact is that even when [Nikita] Khrushchev pulled the missiles out of Cuba, they really didn't get any credit for defusing the crisis. At the time, it was all made to appear that it was [John] Kennedy's toughness that did it. But I think historians will probably give Khrushchev considerable credit in defusing that crisis, even though he created it by putting the missiles in in the first place.

**RITCHIE:** And then paid the price for it.

**WEISS:** The Soviet Union paid a terrible price for trying to keep up with the United States on armaments. That really contributed to the collapse of the system. You're also talking about 70 years of economic nonsense being applied in a country that had no business trying to establish a communist state. When Marx talked about socialism, he didn't have Russia in mind, he had Germany in mind, an industrialized state. So the experiment in the Soviet Union was a total disaster and was destined to be so from the very beginning. Anyway, this notion of trying to spend all that money on armaments for so many years just meant that they couldn't modernize and create a competitive economy. Now they are paying the price in spades. Russia is on the verge of being a failed state. They are the only industrialized country where the life span is going down, the population is going down. It's just a complete disaster and it's really hard to see how they will come out of it.

**RITCHIE:** Well, to switch gears, we're still in the 1980s, but in 1986 the election went in favor of the Democrats and you became the staff director of the Governmental Affairs Committee.

**WEISS:** Before we get to the election, let me just say a few things about when we were in the minority. I went back and took a look at some things that I was doing when we were in the minority, between '81 and '87. We spent a lot of time—and I've got correspondence down in my basement which I took a quick look at, boxes and boxes of it, just to leaf through it. We were sending a lot of letters, for example. We obviously didn't have control of the Senate so we couldn't hold hearings. We could participate, but we couldn't really drive the agenda. We basically were trying to put pressure on the administration about various issues that we were concerned with. For example, we were following very closely the administration's nuclear policies, and the policy of nuclear cooperation with other countries. We were very concerned about the fact that they were clearly moving toward signing a nuclear agreement with China.

In a previous interview I mentioned my relationship with Richard Kennedy. I don't know if I mentioned how strongly Kennedy was trying to get an agreement with

China. The problem with getting an agreement with China was that because of the Non-Proliferation Act China had to have an unequivocal policy of not supporting proliferation of nuclear weapons. At that point, they had not signed the NPT and so the question was: On what basis could the United States sign a nuclear agreement with China? Kennedy would come to Glenn's office, because we were the lead on this issue on the Democratic side, and he would say he's got assurances from the Chinese government that they no longer subscribe to their old policy of proliferation—I mean, it was a conscious policy of China earlier to help other countries get nuclear weapons.

We started doing an investigation. There were people in the State Department who were friendly to our point of view and so it was easy to get information. What we discovered was that the assurances that Kennedy was talking about were not even on paper. There was a party that he attended in Beijing in which the head of the Chinese government—it may have been Deng Xiaoping—made a toast. The toast included the words: "We do not proliferate nuclear weapons. We don't support proliferation of nuclear weapons." And it was on that basis that Kennedy came back and said he had assurances from the Chinese government. We pressed the administration on it and eventually they did get some sort of a written statement from the Chinese which reiterated what was said in this toast. But that was the basis on which they were trying to push an agreement through on nuclear cooperation with China.

Well, we helped prevent it from happening at the time. It wasn't just us. Glenn was making speeches on the Senate floor, which I had written. There was also intelligence information that was coming in showing that the Chinese were in fact sending nuclear equipment to various places that they shouldn't be sending it to. In the end, the agreement was postponed. Eventually we did sign an agreement with China, but it ended up taking place about 10 years after the initial work by Kennedy. That was an example of the work we were doing.

We were also following up on what was happening with the Indians and the Pakistanis. The Pakistanis really were a difficult case. The war in Afghanistan had started with the Soviet invasion in 1979. Did I talk about this before?

**RITCHIE:** No.

**WEISS:** Well, all right, this is of some interest then because it was an important part of my career. In 1979, when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, the Pakistanis in fact had been cut off under the Symington Amendment from receiving U.S. military and economic assistance. Glenn supported the cutoff, but then after the invasion, both the Carter and then the Reagan administration felt that they needed Pakistani help in order to get arms to the Mujahedin. I told Glenn—I mean, this became a really difficult issue for us, because we thought that stopping the bomb in Pakistan was more important than

giving the Soviets a black eye in Afghanistan. Nobody liked the idea of the Soviets invading Afghanistan for the purpose of shoring up their puppet regime, but on the other hand if Pakistan got the bomb we felt that the consequences of that would be much more serious. That wasn't the way the Cold Warriors looked at it. Their bugaboo was the Soviet Union and the Cold War. Everything else paled by comparison.

So the Reagan administration got the Congress to give the Pakistanis a waiver of the prohibitions under the Symington and Glenn amendments to the Foreign Assistance Act. For Glenn, I think, it was a very difficult vote. He voted for the waiver. Now, he did accomplish one thing, which was they wanted a permanent waiver and he objected to that. We wrote op-eds and letters, and made speeches on the floor. In the end, they agreed that they would only seek a temporary waiver. They got a six-year waiver for Pakistan. Then the waiver would have to be renewed. We also wrote into the bill that gave Pakistan the six-year waiver that if the Pakistanis were to explode a nuclear device during that period they would be cut off no matter what else was going on. The bill passed. We watched very carefully the intelligence reports that were coming in about Pakistani nuclear behavior, which was frequently at odds with what the administration was telling Congress

Now, Pakistan was receiving both overt and covert military assistance. The covert assistance was to go to the Mujahedin through Pakistan's intelligence agency. But some of it was being kept by Pakistan. The ostensible reason for the legislation was fear that the Soviets might invade Pakistan as well. This was to help Pakistani national security. The arms for Pakistan were supposed to be deployed to deter a Soviet invasion. But the Pakistanis did not deploy them in the northwestern part of the country, that is, near the border with Afghanistan. It was going to the other side of Pakistan, in other words where the border with India was located. So the Pakistanis clearly felt that their national security problem was mainly with the Indians and not with the fact that the Soviets were in Afghanistan. While all this military assistance, which ended up being roughly five billion dollars' worth, was being sent over there, the Pakistani nuclear weapons program just continued.

Every time we got a new piece of information, Glenn would go to the floor and make a speech, introduce a resolution—because the funding for these programs had to be done every year. Pakistan had a six-year waiver, but the funding for assistance had to be done every year. Every year, Glenn would go to the floor, argue against funding because of what the Pakistanis were doing, and get beaten. He did his duty.

By the end of that period, the Pakistanis were very close to having a bomb. In fact, the evidence is that they probably had it in 1987. And yet there was a failure to recognize that this was more important than what was happening in Afghanistan. The

Pakistanis, for example, were doing things like sending agents to the United States to purchase special equipment for the nuclear weapons program. Some of these agents got caught and were being prosecuted. The Pakistanis would claim these were rogue elements that had nothing to do with government policies. We would convict them and quietly deport them back to Pakistan and expunge any reference to the fact that what they were buying was nuclear related. Everybody knew what was going on and as a result new legislation got introduced and passed, which I worked on. It wasn't Glenn's legislation. There was legislation that was introduced by Larry Pressler, who was a senator from—

**RITCHIE:** South Dakota.

**WEISS:** South Dakota, right, out of the Foreign Relations Committee, which Glenn no longer was on. But nonetheless I was, shall we say, a consultant on the legislation. There are two clauses in the amendment and I wrote one of them. This was designed to put another line in the sand that Pakistan shouldn't cross in order to continue to receive U.S. aid. They crossed it anyway, and the administration basically turned its head in the other direction. They ended up getting the aid; they also got the bomb. The Pressler Amendment forced the president each year from 1987 on, or maybe it was even earlier, from '85 on, to make a determination as to whether the Pakistanis possessed the bomb. If he could not make a determination that they did not possess it, they would get cut off from assistance. The administration knew they possessed it, certainly by '88, but the determination that they didn't possess kept being made essentially on the grounds that "we had no proof of assembly." Well, it was a completely disingenuous way of looking at it. By that argument you could have said the United States didn't have nuclear weapons until sometime late in the '50s, because we always used to keep the components apart in order to avoid an accident.

Then when the Soviets left Afghanistan, having been beaten, somewhere around 1990, the Pakistani cutoff occurred. The president could no longer say that they didn't possess the bomb. It was too obvious at that point, and there was no longer a Soviet presence in Afghanistan, so it happened.

Also during this same period in the '80s, we followed very closely what was happening inside the International Atomic Energy Agency because we were very worried about the fact that nuclear technical assistance was being sent to lots of different countries under the IAEA program. We felt that not enough attention was being paid to safeguards. So we were constantly harassing the IAEA about their safeguards regime, which meant that Hans Blix, who was the head of the agency at the time, would show up at Glenn's office at least twice a year to make sure that we weren't doing anything that might be a problem for them, because we were so critical of the agency. Now, we were critical at the same time we were supportive. That is, we always supported increasing the

agency's budget. We always supported particularly increasing the amount of assistance being given to the safeguards regime. We were not particularly enamored of the technical assistance part of the agency's program because we felt that that was contributing to proliferation.

Blix was caught in the middle. He was the director of the agency, he had to be supportive of the agency, but I think he probably shared many of the criticisms that we made, although he didn't like that we were so public with it. I had, I think, a reasonably good relationship with him. He occasionally corresponded with me about various things that the agency was doing. I found some letters this morning as I was rifling through my papers in preparation for this interview.

Glenn was also very concerned about the cuts by the Reagan administration in the areas of science and technology research in the United States. All the programs that dealt with, for example, creation of new sources of energy, programs for developing new technologies in conservation, and solar, and biomass, and renewable resources generally, all of those programs were being cut. Also even some programs in basic science were being cut, although the Reaganites were not as bad on basic science, for example, as the current administration is. But Glenn didn't like it, and I wrote an editorial for him that appeared in *Science Magazine*, and he was making speeches on the Senate floor about that. One time, Frank Press, who had been Jimmy Carter's science advisor, came over to me at a meeting that I attended at the National Academy of Sciences, to say that he was really glad that Glenn was doing all this work because he said, "Otherwise there would be no debate going on about what's happening to the science and technology budget." Only Glenn was really taking the issue on. So we did that as well.

Another thing I should mention is that after Reagan came in he gave [George] Bush a special assignment as vice president. Bush created at Reagan's request something called the Council on Competitiveness. This council was designed to ride herd on the regulatory process of government. Normally, every agency wrote its own regulations in accordance with whatever legislation the Congress had passed. But proposed regulations were to be reviewed by OMB. This Council on Competitiveness basically became the vehicle for the review of agency regulations. They were much tougher than the agencies in terms of making sure that regulations were more supportive of business than of the public. We had a lot of fights with the administration about what the Council on Competitiveness was doing. First of all, we couldn't find out precisely what they were doing because their records were closed. They were considered to be advisors to the president and therefore subject to a claim of its executive privilege. What they did was not on the public record, so there was no record. I went to the Old Executive Office Building more than once to meet with their executive director, the second of which ended

up later on as a congressman from Indiana. But I was unable to get any useful information from them

Whenever a hearing was scheduled involving OMB, we always had Glenn ask questions about the Council on Competitiveness and their relationship to OMB. For example, was there one instance where OMB challenged a change “suggested” by the council? They were unable to give us one example. The fact of the matter was that this council was really doing the work that OMB was supposed to do, and there was no record of what they were doing, and who they were meeting with. It was all kind of mysterious as to how these regulations were reviewed, even though there were people inside the agencies who were screaming bloody murder about the fact that regulations were being substantially changed or blocked after the agency would send them to OMB for review. We tried to make some noise about that. I don’t think we were terribly successful because the end result was that a lot of regulations were gutted or blocked and the record of the Reagan administration, let’s say on environmental protection, was just absolutely awful. .

I think that covers pretty much what we were doing in the time when we were minority, before Glenn became the chairman of the full committee.

**RITCHIE:** In that time period, when he was speaking regularly on nuclear issues, were other senators deferring to him, or were there other senators speaking out on that issue as well?

**WEISS:** No, he really was the voice of the Senate on those issues. I think I’m pretty accurate in saying that. He really took the lead on those issues and ran with it. This was great for me. I was really interested in the subject. And we didn’t have much of a staff. When we were minority I had, I think, two legislative people besides myself, plus one secretary, and that was it. That was to cover all the work of the subcommittee. I think even at one point I was down to one other person, a fellow named Brian Dettelbach, besides myself doing the work of the subcommittee. In one sense it gave us a certain amount of freedom because we weren’t responsible for creating and carrying out a legislative agenda. We were in a reactive mode. But on the other hand it meant that we could concentrate our investigative efforts on anything that interested us. So Glenn, yes, if you go back and look at the *Congressional Record* for those years, I don’t think you’re going to find a hell of a lot of speeches by other senators on the proliferation issue. He kept the issue alive.

Now I think many people have forgotten that. Once the Nunn-Lugar legislation passed, everybody thought [Sam] Nunn and [Richard] Lugar were the leaders in nonproliferation. That legislation passed about 1995, or thereabouts. But neither Nunn nor Lugar were anywhere on these issues before that. Glenn really was all by himself.



**RITCHIE:** Well, the Senate's a good place for voices in the wilderness.

**WEISS:** Oh, yes. No question about it.

**RITCHIE:** Well, things changed in '86 when the parties changed. You went from minority to majority. You talked about losing all your space when you went the other way. What happened when you wound up back in the majority?

**WEISS:** Well, of course we took over a whole suite of offices in the Dirksen Building. I now had more space than I really needed. I started hiring all kinds of people and we ended up with a pretty big staff at that point. I had developed a very ambitious agenda, which Glenn signed off on. In fact, there was an article about Glenn's new role in the *Washington Post*. It was headlined "Mr. Checklist."<sup>1</sup> I had given the reporter the agenda that we were looking at, and it was a long list of things that I felt we might get into. And we did get into nearly all of them by the end of Glenn's term. It was ambitious, but we had lots of money. We re-ordered the way the committee operated a bit in order to bring more money into the full committee from the subcommittees. So that worked out pretty well.

That was when we expanded the inspectors general to all kinds of agencies. I think we created 31 new IGs. We created the chief financial officers, so now every major agency was going to have a CFO, so that agencies would have to detail how they were spending their money and make a report to Congress. We passed the Congressional Accountability Act, which was written in our committee. I hired a guy named Larry Noble to do that work specifically—he was terrific—where the Congress was now going to be subject to many of the same regulations as the agencies and the private sector, though not in all respects.

This was another thing: in the '80s we were also doing a lot of work on nuclear safety. Not in conjunction with hearings or anything, we were just doing investigations on our own and writing letters to DOE ] and elsewhere, looking in particular at the safety of workers working in the nuclear industry. We discovered all kinds of really terrible things that were going on. When the opportunity came, when Glenn became chairman, we ended up writing the legislation that created the Defense Nuclear Facility Safety Board. This was a board that was created for the purpose of looking at specifically those parts of the Department of Energy that had to do with creating nuclear materials for the defense program. It was a five-man board. It still exists, and they do reports every year. I think they've generally been a force for good. So all those things were being done, while at the same time, of course, we expanded our work in the nuclear proliferation area. I had

<sup>1</sup> Judith Havemann, "Mr. Checklist's' Busy Agenda: Glenn Brainstorming Active Schedule for Inactive Committee," *Washington Post*, November 26, 1986.

hired a terrific young political scientist from Livermore National Laboratory named Randy Rydell, and he moved our nonproliferation effort a significant notch higher. He wrote a bill expanding my work on the Symington and Glenn amendments, and on the NNPA, and it was passed into law in 1994.

**RITCHIE:** After '86 you went from being a subcommittee staff director to being the committee staff director.

**WEISS:** That's correct.

**RITCHIE:** How different is that?

**WEISS:** It's very different. I had to become more of a manager. I had practically no staff just about when I was on the subcommittee minority and now on the full committee majority I had a big staff. I had to manage them in addition to doing whatever work I was doing on my own. It meant my work expanded and I had to worry a lot more about budget matters. I had to deal with subcommittee budgets. It just meant that my managerial responsibilities took up a lot more time than had been the case earlier. It also meant that I interacted a lot more with staff directors of other committees. For instance, all the Democratic staff directors met every Monday morning for breakfast to talk about what was going to go on that week, and what different committees were doing that might be of interest to others. It was a very interesting time.

**RITCHIE:** How autonomous are subcommittees? Did you try to coordinate what they were doing or did they essentially each do their own thing?

**WEISS:** It depends on the committee. In some committees the subcommittees are staffed by full committee staff. In other words, senators who are made chairmen of subcommittees are assigned staff people that are actually hired by the full committee chairman to do the work of the subcommittee. It becomes a lot easier to coordinate in that case, because everybody's responsible ultimately to the same boss. That was the way the Governmental Affairs Committee operated until Abe Ribicoff became chairman. When Abe Ribicoff became chairman he changed the system. He wanted the subcommittees to be more autonomous. I'm not quite sure why he did that, but once that system was established it was impossible to take it back. Once the subcommittee chairmen had their own autonomy and their own budget, they weren't going to give that up.

We inherited that system and so we kept it, although I did decrease the budgets of a couple of subcommittees. It caused some heartburn, as you might expect, particularly for the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations (PSI), whose budget we cut considerably, by about 25 or 30 percent. Sam Nunn was the subcommittee chairman and

did not like that, but nonetheless we did it because we had a lot of plans for work that we wanted to do and so we did it.

**RITCHIE:** I was going to ask you about the Permanent Subcommittee. It's an unusual subcommittee in that it grew out of the old Truman Committee and it's the only subcommittee that I know that has the title "Permanent" in it.

**WEISS:** That's right.

**RITCHIE:** As an investigating committee, it tends to get a lot of publicity. I wondered how it fit into the rest of the committee.

**WEISS:** It didn't fit in very well in some ways before we took over the committee. The Permanent Subcommittee had a long legislated jurisdictional list and had twice the money that Ribicoff allocated to himself as chairman. But my view of it, after we came in, was that this was all one committee, so whatever is in the jurisdiction of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations is also part of the full committee jurisdiction, though only PSI had a legislated jurisdiction. So we took on things which in other years might have been left to the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, but we were doing it at the full committee level with Glenn. Occasionally, just to try to smooth things over a bit, we billed some hearings as joint hearings between the full committee and the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, and we had Sam Nunn be a co-chairman of those hearings with Glenn. We sort of tipped our hat to them in that sense. I think things worked out reasonably well from that perspective.

The Permanent Subcommittee did some things that we had absolutely no interest in. For example, it was almost predictable that every year they would do hearings on organized crime. That was a big thing with them and it always generated press and TV coverage. Well, frankly as Ronald Reagan once said about the redwoods: if you've seen one, you've seen them all. You could always count on those hearings. It was either labor racketeering or various organizations that had stolen some money from the public or the government, or organized crime was involved in some industry. I don't mean to say it wasn't useful, but we were looking at the country's problems nationally, and while we thought that while law enforcement is certainly a big issue, we didn't see the Mafia as a threat to American democracy or national security. So they did their thing and we never got involved in that kind of stuff. In any case, PSI handled its work in a responsible way during my tenure on the committee, unlike its record when Joe McCarthy was the chairman and Roy Cohn the chief counsel in the '50s.

**RITCHIE:** It's interesting what you said about the jurisdiction. Before the committee reorganization in '76, the chairman of the Government Operations Committee almost always chaired the Permanent Subcommittee. They took it as their vehicle.

**WEISS:** That changed when Ribicoff became chairman. It wasn't just that subcommittee, there were three or four other subcommittees, all of whom were now made autonomous and independent. They didn't have a charter like PSI did, but they acted as if they did. We didn't really challenge it, we just adjusted things as they went along. But if somebody retired, it gave us an opportunity to reduce their jurisdiction and bring it into the full committee. (laughs)

**RITCHIE:** I was looking over the *Congressional Quarterly* from that time and the Hatch Act revision was something that came out of Governmental Affairs. It seemed to be an issue that the committee spent years trying to get passed. Were you involved in that?

**WEISS:** Oh, very much. That was a big issue for us. I have to confess, I had partisan reasons for wanting to do Hatch Act reform. It was my view, mistaken as it turned out, that federal employees tended to be Democrats and therefore to the extent that the Hatch Act prevented them from getting involved in politics, the Democrats were at something of a disadvantage because many of their supporters couldn't be involved in campaigns. So I was very interested in Hatch Act reform.

We ended up writing the bill—see we had a subcommittee that dealt with Civil Service, which was headed by the senator from Arkansas, David Pryor. David Pryor was supportive of the idea, but perhaps he saw some negative politics in Arkansas about being too involved with Hatch Act reform. So although it was his subcommittee that was supposed to have the issue, most of the work was done at the full-committee level by our staff. I was very deeply involved in it. There was a woman named Jane McFarland, who I hired, who was our Civil Service person. Jane and I basically did it together. We wrote a bill, which was worked out with compromises that were made in committee, and further compromises that were made on the floor during the debate. But in the end it passed and we got most of what we wanted out of Hatch Act reform.

It did take a while to pass it. Glenn floor managed the bill and I sat next to him for nine days while the debate proceeded. The Republican minority was led by Bill Roth of Delaware, our ranking minority, who was a rock-ribbed conservative but also a very nice man. I really liked him. We had an interesting time on the floor when we were dealing with that bill. Roth, who hated the Hatch Act, came armed with a long list of amendments on the bill, none of which passed. The bill basically went through pretty much as it came out of committee, except for a couple of amendments that we took on the floor, but they were fairly innocuous and not a problem. But Roth had this long list of amendments that really would have gutted the bill. We knocked each one of them down as they came up. As a matter of courtesy, of course, before he would introduce an amendment, Roth would walk across the aisle, or his staff would come over and give us a copy of what he was

going to introduce. They would hand it to me. I would read it and then, after conferring with Glenn, I would go over to Roth's side and tell him our position. When I did this at about the eighth or ninth time, that is, telling him, "We're going to oppose this," he looked at me and smiled and said, "You know, I'm not surprised." (laughs)

So the bill ended up getting passed, but it has had, as far as I can tell, no impact. It turned out that federal employees, whether because of all the previous Hatch Act restrictions or for whatever other reason, are just not prone to get terribly involved in politics in the first place. And in the second place, despite the philosophical position of the Republican Party about the federal government, there are a lot of Republicans among federal employees, more than I suspected at the time. So in the end my premise for being so hot to trot on Hatch Act reform basically was wrong. But as a matter of democracy, it was the right thing to do nonetheless.

**RITCHIE:** Well, the senior Bush administration vetoed the bill the first time up. I assume they had the same interpretation as you did, that it would favor Democrats.

**WEISS:** Yes, that's right. The Republicans were opposed to Hatch Act reform because I think they also were working on the assumption that federal employees would get involved on the Democratic side. I think what they were looking at was the influence of the government unions. I've got to say that it's true, I think there are more Democrats than Republicans among federal employees, but the gap is not as wide as I thought, and not as wide as the Republicans thought.

**RITCHIE:** I think civil servants tend to be politically discreet because they might be working for the other party after the next election.

**WEISS:** Yes, that's part of it, but you know there's another thing that's going on. I have no statistics on this to quote, it's just a feeling I have, so it could be wrong. I believe that the upper level management in the Civil Service tends to be more Republican, for various reasons. One of which is that following the election of Ronald Reagan on, the political appointees were very careful about hiring. I think that the procedures for promoting people, for hiring people at the upper levels were being affected by politics. It was not overt, because that would be against the law, but I think that it went on. Now the Republicans have had the presidency and therefore the tools of federal hiring from 1981 until Clinton, and now they've had it since then. I believe that there is a subtle political test that is made when management thinks it can get away with it. That's just one of the elements that makes the high levels of the Civil Service a bit more Republican than otherwise.

**RITCHIE:** There also seems to be a tendency toward the end of a president's term to turn a lot of the political appointees into civil servants.

**WEISS:** That does happen. It happens under both parties. But the funny part of it is that the Republicans were a lot more sensitive about it than the Democrats were. When Reagan came in, they did their best to try to stop any of these transfers from being made. Then when the Clintonites came in, I don't think they were quite as sharp about it as the Republicans had been. So for various reasons there are strong Republicans in high-level positions inside the bureaucracy.

**RITCHIE:** Bush vetoed the Hatch Act reform and then Clinton signed it shortly after he came into office. It seemed that one of the drives of the first year or so of the Clinton administration was to pass a lot of legislation that had been vetoed during the Bush years, and sail it through.

**WEISS:** That's right. Clinton, after all, was heavily supported by the postal unions, who were very anxious to get Hatch Act reform passed, because they also thought that it would mean a big bonanza for Democrats. They gave Clinton a ton of money for his election, and supported sympathetic members of Congress, so yes that legislation passed. The signing ceremony had an amusing angle to it. Although David Pryor left the heavy lifting on the Hatch Act reform to Glenn, and was missing most of the time from the Senate floor during the debate, when it came time for the signing ceremony, there is David Pryor in the most favored spot in the room. And the staff director of his subcommittee was next to him. I was sitting over on the side with Glenn, thinking this is really ridiculous!

**RITCHIE:** Well, it was an Arkansas president.

**WEISS:** Right! (laughs)

**RITCHIE:** You mentioned before about the Congressional Accountability Act. What was driving that?

**WEISS:** I think there were a few things that were driving it. The business community and some members of the public generally were becoming very resentful of the fact that the Congress was passing laws that didn't apply to itself. There were complaints about equal employment opportunity, about harassment rules in the workplace, all kinds of ethics rules that people had to live by, and OSHA [Occupational Safety and Health Administration] regulations and various other kinds of workplace regulations. People would write in very forcefully saying that they were under the gun on these things and the Congress gets away with murder. I think the media were playing this up a great deal, as well. Also there was all this awareness about the gap in health care, the Congress has a wonderful health care program and yet many millions of people don't have any health care. The public was becoming more and more aware of the gap between

what the Congress did that affected their lives in the private sector and the fact that the Congress would not agree to have the same rules apply to themselves.

I was sympathetic to these complaints, although I recognized that some of it was coming from elements of the business community that were hoping to reduce government regulations rather than ensuring uniformity of coverage. Regulatory complaints finally reached a level where many felt that Congress needed to step up to the bar and say that if we're going to pass laws that regulate the behavior of people out in the private sector, we should be subject to it also. That was the driving force of the Congressional Accountability Act.

**RITCHIE:** It passed the Senate, didn't pass the House, but then when the Republicans were running in '94 they made it part of the Contract with America and passed it very early in the 104<sup>th</sup> Congress.

**WEISS:** Yes, I think that's right. I supported the act because I thought it was fair and appropriate. Newt Gingrich supported it because he hoped it would stop the Congress from passing legislation to make regulations more onerous on the private sector. It also solidified small business support for the Republican Party. So there was a mix of motivations for the passage of the act after the Republicans took over the Congress.

**RITCHIE:** I talked to one of the Republican sergeants at arms, whose job it was to enforce it. He said that when he went around to the members they would say, "I can't believe I voted for that bill!" It's created a lot of headaches.

**WEISS:** I'm sure it's created headaches, but those headaches were created by Congress for the private sector, so it was perfectly fair. That wasn't the only bill that came out of Governmental Affairs that has caused headaches. After the Republicans took over the committee in 1995, Bill Roth started pushing a bill that ultimately became the Government Performance and Results Act. He got the idea from a staffer who was once the mayor of Sunnyvale, California, except his staff guy had only a half-baked idea of how to realize it. The idea was to require federal agencies to adopt performance criteria and goals, and then report on how they were doing.

Roth's draft bill was a nightmare. Clinton's OMB people and we thought it would be a major impediment to effective and efficient government operation, and could be used by Congress to tie up an agency they didn't like. So, although we were the minority at that point, we worked with OMB to write a more responsible bill that we thought everyone could live with. The work here was done by a terrific young lawyer I hired named David Plocher, who is now with the GAO. So, although Bill Roth got the lion's share of the credit, the work on the bill was mainly done by Glenn's staff. This was an example of bipartisan cooperation engendered in part by our realization that the

Republicans could pass any bill they wanted plus the fact that it made sense to try to get a better handle on how well agencies were doing their job.

Frankly, a better way would be for Congress to hold more oversight hearings, but the Republicans wanted more paperwork and we couldn't block them, so we fashioned a bill that at least had the potential to improve government. The agencies, of course, have had nothing good to say about the Performance and Results Act, and have hired additional people whose jobs consist of little more than helping the agencies carry out the requirements of the act. I'm unsure whether government is working better (the agencies say it is), but at least we prevented significant harm from being done.

Now I would like to talk about another issue, and that is on where the committee missed a golden opportunity. I have been a bug about campaign finance reform. I was hoping we would get a good campaign finance reform law passed before my career ended, and it really didn't happen. A proposed bill, introduced in 1997, that ultimately became the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002 (McCain-Feingold), to me, was insufficient. When the bill passed and there were all these congratulatory messages being made in the press, I said to Glenn, "I just don't understand all these congratulatory messages rolling in to John McCain and Russ Feingold and everybody else who voted for it," because there was no question in my mind that that bill would do nothing except create a different avenue for money to flow in. Glenn disagreed, but I think I've been proved right in my skepticism.

One of the first things I remember reading after coming to work in the Congress, because I was interested in campaign finance reform, was the *Buckley v. Valeo* decision. I felt from the get-go that until the Supreme Court changed its mind about money being speech, we weren't going to be able to reform the process. What's happened with McCain-Feingold simply reinforced my view about that, because until you control the expenditure of money, you're not going to get a handle on campaign finance reform. It's just not going to happen. There was hardly anybody in the Congress—I don't know if there is a single person in the Congress besides John Glenn on either side who has publicly supported controlling campaign expenditures. There were a lot of things I pushed him on that he might not otherwise have done, but on this one I didn't have to push at all. He just believed that public financing of campaigns is the only way campaign money ought to be raised.

Under such a system, once a candidate gets the public money, he can't spend any other money for the purpose of getting elected, and that's that. In terms of independent expenditures, you have to find a way of controlling independent expenditures and there are ways of doing that, that I believe are constitutional. If people want to spend their own money, let them do it some months before an election, up until a certain point, and then



you prohibit it after that point, so you don't get any of this blizzard and barrage of ads coming in the last two weeks of a campaign that can turn an election around. That's always been my view about how campaign finance reform ought to be done, but at the moment whenever you bring it up, which we did, people would refer to *Buckley v. Valeo* and say it's unconstitutional because money is speech and you are therefore violating the First Amendment if you try to control expenditures.

**RITCHIE:** I always think it's disingenuous of television commentators to say "They're spending too much money on campaigns," when most of the money is going to television.

**WEISS:** I just find it somewhat abhorrent to me, as someone in favor of a democratic system of government, that a rich person should have more of a say in terms of political expression than a poor person. I think it just flies in the face of what a democratic society is supposed to be. Glenn supported the bill that ultimately became McCain-Feingold but he said in public statements that he believed that the best way to finance a political campaign was through tax money.

**RITCHIE:** To some degree he had personal experience with his own presidential campaign. He had a lot of bills left over that he had a lot of trouble with.

**WEISS:** Oh, yes, there's that, and then there's also his relationship with Charles Keating, which was kind of interesting. I never met Charles Keating, but he came to Glenn's office a number of times. In fact, the first time I heard of him was when I was over in Glenn's office for some reason or other. At that point he had an administrative assistant named Mary Jane Veno, and she still works for him, by the way. She normally had very good political instincts, but her personality would change in the presence of large donors to Glenn. On this occasion I went to the office to talk to her about something and she couldn't talk to me, she was just absolutely aflutter. She was nervous, and I said, "What's going on?" She said, "Well, Charlie Keating is coming." I said, "Who?" (laughs) I didn't know who he was. Then I quickly learned that Charles Keating had given something like \$250,000 to Glenn for one of his campaigns. Exactly what Glenn could do for him, I was unsure of. But there was no question that he thought he could do something.

Keating was in trouble with a regulatory agency. I think it was a banking agency. And there were five senators who were involved. One of whom was Glenn, another was McCain. Then there was Donald Riegle, Alan Cranston, and Dennis DeConcini. So push came to shove and all five got into trouble. The Ethics Committee became involved and they were going to hold these hearings. Glenn hired Bob Bennett as a lawyer. Whenever I would talk to Mary Jane Veno, she'd say, "John was absolutely innocent." Glenn himself would occasionally say something about it and made it clear he was very upset about all

of this and felt that he was being pilloried for no reason, because there were all kinds of editorials criticizing him and the others.

I was sympathetic until I got hold of the transcript of the meeting these senators had with the head of the agency. The head of the agency was a Republican who had been a political operative. The transcript was somewhat revealing. There was an investigation going on of some kind of deal with Lincoln Savings and Loan, which Keating owned through a holding company. I don't remember all the details, but as I recall it was something about how people would come into the bank for some business or financial advice, and they would be directed to invest, or pressured to invest, in some stocks or something through Lincoln Savings and Loan. They were stocks in something that Keating was involved in, and it was not a good investment. They were basically lied to, and a lot of people lost a lot of money. So there was a question of fraud.

The banking agency was investigating this, but they were a little slow in terms of coming to a conclusion. The meeting with the senators was designed—the senators had asked for the meeting—and it was designed to pressure the agency to make a decision. After the senators came in (it's coming back to me slowly as I think about this) there was a lot of discussion going on. All the senators were engaged in the discussion with the head of the agency, whose name was Ed Gray, but the most aggressive senator pushing Gray was Glenn. Then, at some point, Gray said, "Well, there may be some indictments coming down." As soon as the word "indictment" was said, everybody shut up and the meeting ended soon thereafter. I just remember being appalled by what I was reading. It got me into a little bit of trouble with Mr. Glenn for a while. One day, I was in his office while he was going through all this trouble with the Ethics Committee, and he was lamenting the fact that he was in this difficulty. He felt that it was terribly unfair. I think at this point all the other senators had had their cases taken care of by the Ethics Committee with the exception of Glenn and McCain.

**RITCHIE:** I think he was arguing that they kept him in the case because they wanted to keep McCain in the case.

**WEISS:** Right.

**RITCHIE:** But the reason they wanted to keep McCain in was because he was the only Republican. If they let Glenn out they'd have to let McCain out and then it would only be Democrats under investigation.

**WEISS:** That's right. Glenn understood that they couldn't let him go without McCain, but he resented it, because he felt he was just as innocent as all the others. But from my point of view, they were all guilty. Anyway, I was in the office all by myself with him and he started talking about it. He was lamenting the fact that this had

happened. I don't know what came over me, I just couldn't contain myself anymore, and I said to him, "Look, Senator, you should understand, you went to bat for a sleazebag." He looked at me and he said something about: "Well, have you said things like this to people on the outside?" At this point, I was actually on my way out the door. I said, "Well, I talk to my wife, does that count?" And I just left. I didn't know whether he was going to fire me or what. He didn't fire me, and the fact of the matter is I really didn't talk to people on the outside about it. I was being loyal to him. But there was no question in my mind that he had done something wrong and in that sense he deserved what he was getting.

The funny part about it is that in a way, McCain has gotten away with a lot of stuff on the Keating case. He got pilloried at the time, but he has overcome this and now he's this sort of grand old independent man and a political hero to many people. But he took vacations on Charles Keating's pocket and then intervened on Keating's behalf by showing up at the meeting with Ed Gray, and until he got caught there is no evidence he thought it was wrong. There was no question about the fact that Keating had thrown his weight around and people buckled under it. They just loved the money. It is really a symptom of what's wrong with the system because although Keating ultimately went to jail for what he did with Lincoln Savings and Loan, the fact of the matter is that legalized bribery is what goes on in the U.S. Congress every day, with the way in which lobbyists' money influences access.

Now, having told this story, I will say that in my opinion John Glenn was one of the *best* people in the Senate from an ethics point of view, and therefore it shows how bad the system is when he could get caught in a situation like that. You saw it every day, lobbyists in the halls. You knew who was getting what money from where for campaigns. For people to argue that it doesn't affect how legislation gets done is ridiculous. Of course it affects it. If the system doesn't change we're ultimately going to end up in a very bad way.

**RITCHIE:** As late as when Hubert Humphrey was in the Senate he used to say it was nice to be a senator because you could not pay attention to money for five years and only have to raise it in the sixth. Now essentially they raise it every year, every month, that they're in office.

**WEISS:** Absolutely right.

**RITCHIE:** I suppose that makes it difficult to decide in what capacity you're dealing with a person who's sitting in your office, on an issue or as a potential fundraiser.

**WEISS:** Yes, and it affects it in all kinds of ways. My view is if, on an issue, a person comes to your senatorial office and represents a large constituency of his own in your state, obviously you should listen to him. He represents people who are part of your own constituency. But if somebody who doesn't even live in the state walks into your office and can get a hearing in your office, merely because he can put big bucks into your campaign, there's something really fundamentally wrong with a system that allows that to happen. But trying to get legislation, even trying to get some of the NGOs [Non-Governmental Organizations] to take it on at the time was difficult.

I remember talking to a woman who was the head of the Council for Excellence in Government, who used to invite me to appear on their panels once in a while. She once took me to lunch for the purpose of trying to get some ideas from me as to what they ought to be looking at. I said, "If you want excellence in government, you've got to have ethics in government. If you want ethics in government, you've got to get private money out of the business of being able to influence the way government is run and what government does. If you don't get involved in campaign finance reform, everything else you do is going to be secondary. You're working at the margins rather than working at the core of what's wrong with the American government." But they didn't do anything on it. And the Congress hasn't done anything about it, except the McCain-Feingold Act, which I think in the end people will finally see doesn't get at the problem.

They've got to get *Buckley v. Valeo* back into the Supreme Court. It won't make any difference with *this* court (laughs) but it will with another court. Now, I was deeply involved with the campaign reform investigation that the Governmental Affairs Committee did. That was the last big issue that I dealt with before I retired. Do you want to talk about it?

**RITCHIE:** Yes.

**WEISS:** When the Republicans announced that they were going to do a campaign finance reform investigation, it was after the election of '96. Fred Thompson had been elected senator from Tennessee and they gave him the chairmanship of Governmental Affairs, because the Republicans had taken over the Senate. It was announced that the Governmental Affairs Committee would do the campaign finance investigation—that is, the investigation of the way in which the Clinton campaign raised money in '96. I asked Glenn to telephone Fred Thompson—I think this was in December, before he became chairman, but we knew all this was coming. It was already out that Thompson was going to lead this investigation. I said, "Well, Thompson is supposed to be sort of a moderate, so maybe we can strike a blow for campaign finance reform." In other words, we don't want to stop an investigation of fund-raising by Clinton, but the right way to do it is to get Thompson to agree to look at fund-raising by both sides, really expose all of the

problems involving fund-raising, and create a record that would enable us to write a bipartisan bill on campaign finance reform. If the hearings really catch the public's imagination, we might be able to overcome the internal institutional opposition to reform because of the demand of the public. Get the public mad enough and you can get it done.

Glenn thought that was a good idea, so he called up Thompson, made an appointment, and we went to see him. Now, Thompson hadn't really hired any staff yet, so it was just him, and Glenn, and me in a meeting. Glenn raised the issue, just the way I laid it out, and Thompson's response was two-fold, maybe three-fold. I was sitting there taking notes. First he said he wasn't interested in turning the investigation he was going to do into a "seminar" on campaign finance reform. Secondly, it was his belief that some laws had been broken and some people probably should go to jail, and the committee needed to expose that. And third, he said, I had better not quote anything I was writing down to anybody because there would be hell to pay for it if I did.

All right, the meeting ended. As we walked out, I said to Glenn, "I don't know how you feel about it, but it's obvious to me this is going to be a partisan witch hunt and we're in, unfortunately, for a partisan fight, but we'll do the best we can to see if we can get some information out in the public about fund-raising by both sides." We ended up hiring our staff. I started off hiring Mike Davidson—do you remember he was the Senate's Legal Counsel.

I hired Mike Davidson and was roundly applauded by everybody for the coup of having hired Mike Davidson to be our counsel. By the end of the first hearing that took place, it was clear that Mike Davidson was the wrong guy for the job. Mike is a wonderful person. He's a great lawyer and he knows a lot, and he is a Democrat, but much to my amazement, he was acting as if everybody involved in this business was either nonpartisan or bipartisan, and that was the way he was approaching his job. On the first day, Thompson came in with an opening attack on Democratic fund-raising and a list of 54 subpoenas that they were going to issue, 52 of which were going to Democrats, and Davidson thought that was okay and didn't provide Glenn with a response. In the middle of the hearing, I took him aside and said, "Mike, you can't do it this way. They've decided to make this partisan and we have no choice except to fight back."

I was not the only one who was dismayed. All the Democrats on the committee were dismayed at what happened. Tom Daschle was upset and he called Glenn and we had a meeting with him and the other Democrats on the committee. They thought that because Glenn had hired Mike Davidson, Glenn was unwilling to fight. It wasn't true, it was simply that we misread Mike Davidson. So Mike was let go and I hired Alan Baron, and this time I asked Alan to show up at a meeting with Tom Daschle and a few other Democrats to make sure that there was no further misunderstanding. Alan came in and

said, “We’re in a war, that’s the way we’re going to have to deal with it.” He turned out to really be superb.

The hearings went on and it was a partisan exercise, but we did fight back pretty effectively. Now, before all of this happened, before I hired Alan, and before I even hired Mike, people were looking to me to give some idea as to how this would go from a Democratic perspective. The first thing I did, after I found out that Thompson was going to lead the investigation, was to read Thompson’s memoir about the Watergate affair.<sup>2</sup> I’m old enough to remember Watergate in great detail. I remember Thompson’s role in the Watergate hearings. It was a very interesting book. Not very well written, but it was very interesting. Two things jumped out at me. One was that he was very rankled about the way in which he was treated as minority council by Sam Ervin and the Democrats. He complained that they issued subpoenas without telling him. When he wanted to have subpoenas issued they wouldn’t issue the subpoenas he wanted. He admitted he had a fanciful theory that Richard Nixon was innocent and that Watergate was a plot by the CIA and Nixon was being the fall guy for something that the CIA tried to pull off.

I read all of this and I decided that Thompson might still be harboring some resentment about the way he was treated by Democrats in an investigation all those years before and now it was pay-back time. I took the book, I had my own copy, and I marked it up, and I took it with me when I went to the staff directors’ meeting on Monday morning at breakfast. I was called upon to say something about the investigation that was going to take place. I opened Thompson’s book and said, “Well, here’s what I think is going to happen. I think it’s going to be a partisan investigation.” I told them about Glenn’s meeting with Thompson, and that I had read Thompson’s book. I quoted some passages from it, and I said, “It looks to me that he’s going to run this investigation the way he claims Sam Ervin did.”

Then I got invited to make a presentation before the House staff directors, same thing. I went there with the book and told them the same story. What I didn’t realize, which I should have—it shows that sometimes you can be naive even though you’ve got a lot of years of experience—I didn’t realize that Thompson had a spy in the meeting. Somebody there relayed the word back to Thompson through Mike Madigan, who had been hired by Thompson as his chief counsel for the investigation, as to what I had said at these meetings. I had not hired Mike Davidson yet, but shortly after the staff directors’ meetings, Glenn had a meeting with Thompson and Mike Madigan, and I was with Glenn. The four of us were at this meeting, and at some point Madigan said something which Glenn didn’t like. I can’t remember what it was, but it was some suggestion that

<sup>2</sup>Fred D. Thompson, *At That Point in Time: The Inside Story of the Senate Watergate Committee* (New York: Quadrangle/New York Times Book Co., 1975).

Glenn was going to be defending these nefarious practices of the White House. Glenn got really incensed and spoke sharply to Madigan, at which point Thompson simply blew up and he started screaming at Glenn about, “Your man, sitting right there, has been going around misrepresenting my motivations for this investigation and quoting my book!” That took me by surprise, and I realized Thompson had a spy at what were meetings of high level Democratic staff.

There was another meeting that was scheduled within a few days, or a week later, because Tom Daschle from the Republicans wanted to get some understanding about how the investigation might go. The meeting was with Daschle, Trent Lott, Glenn, and Thompson, in Trent Lott’s office, because he was the majority leader. I went with Glenn over there. Madigan came, too, so there were a group of us staff people, but we had to wait outside Lott’s office while the meeting went on. When it ended, these four grim-faced men came out of the room. Daschle, who I had gotten to know because we had a lot of meetings with him when we were managing legislation on the floor, came over to me and said, “This meeting was really awful, and Len, you should know, Thompson attacked you viciously.”

So Thompson had it in for me, and I told a couple of Daschle’s people about this, Larry Stein and Glenn Ivey. I said, “We have a problem. Obviously somebody at one of the meetings I attended and spoke at told Thompson what I was saying. I won’t be able to give briefings about the investigation in the future without feeling that there’s a spy in the room.” They were ruminating about who might have done it, and they told me that there was a woman who was working for John Breaux who they knew had been dating Thompson. They thought that was probably where the leak came from.

The hearings finally occurred and we put up a pretty good defense. What we did was to show that whatever claims were made about Democratic fund-raising had a counterpart on the Republican side. Things got really sort of nasty. They claimed there was evidence—they alluded to it because they couldn’t prove it—of foreign money coming into the Clinton campaign. One of the worse things was Thad Cochran came to the Senate floor even before the hearings occurred and made a presentation with a chart in which he all but accused a named U.S. citizen of being a spy for China. The man Cochran talked about was a naturalized citizen who had raised money for Democrats, but he had some connections to a company that had business connections with China. Cochran was supposedly connecting the dots concerning this man’s actions, and basically was saying this guy was an agent for the Chinese government, which was giving money to the Democratic Party. It was just totally outrageous.

That’s sort of the way the hearings went, lots of innuendo about foreign money. In the end, the funny part of it was we exposed *real* information that somebody with *real*

connections to the Taiwanese government had given money to Haley Barbour for political purposes. So the hearings didn't go well from Thompson's point of view at all. In the end, it just faded away. But there were some personally unpleasant things that happened in the meantime. Glenn had a press conference at one point. I went to the press conference with him and there was a reporter named Ed Henry, who you may know.

**RITCHIE:** He was with *Roll Call*.

**WEISS:** Right. He asked Glenn something about the Republicans claiming that Chinese money may have gone to the Democrats. Before Glenn could answer, I jumped in and I said, "Don't assume that if Chinese money has gone to an American presidential campaign it has only gone to one side." That's all I said. Henry wrote a story in *Roll Call*. The story appeared the next day and it quoted me. Then I got a letter later from Thompson that day that said something to the effect: "You are quoted in this newspaper. I want you to tell me whether this quote is accurate, and if it is it will determine my next step." It was a threat of unknown dimension. So what should I do? I went to Glenn and I showed him the letter. Basically he said, "Well, you have to answer this." I said, "Yes, I know, I understand that. I think I need some legal advice, who should I go to?" He suggested Bob Bauer, he's a lawyer who worked for the DNC [Democratic National Committee]. I called Bob Bauer and he made some suggestion about what I should say in my response to Thompson's letter. I didn't care for his suggestion, actually, because in essence he was telling me to deny the whole thing. I didn't feel I could because Ed Henry had gotten the story and the quote right. But Bauer did give me some idea about how to word my response.

I wrote a letter back to Thompson and I said something to the effect that the quote was correct but the reporter did not report the entire context in which the quote was made. That was all. I heard nothing more. The investigation went on. About two to three months later, I got a letter from the CIA. It was a copy of a letter they sent to Fred Thompson. It said, in words to this effect: "With respect to your request for an investigation as to whether Leonard Weiss had revealed classified information, we have determined that no classified information was revealed by his statement." That was it. I thought, "What an SOB!" He didn't tell Glenn he was asking for a CIA investigation. He didn't tell anybody. He was trying to get me fired and in trouble, hoping that maybe by my having said, "Don't assume that the Chinese give only to one side," that maybe there was some classified information somewhere that the Chinese had given money to the Republicans that I happened to know about, and I was revealing something, and therefore I could be in trouble for revealing classified information. I mean, it was the sleaziest thing imaginable.



I said to Glenn, when I showed him the letter, “Now I understand more clearly the relationship of Fred Thompson to Richard Nixon.” (laughs) More clearly than when I read his book and when I saw those hearings on television. There’s one other aspect of this story. Thompson sent me that letter, but he didn’t say anything public about it himself, but he had his staff people give anonymous quotes to Ed Henry, saying that they thought I had revealed classified information. Henry reported the story under a headline that said: “Top Democrat Accused.” There was a whispering campaign going on that I had revealed classified information. They were doing everything they could to create a climate of suspicion about me, and it had an effect, because when that story appeared in *Roll Call*, the next Monday morning breakfast I was treated like a pariah. I walked into that room and nobody wanted to talk to me. It was clear that there was a campaign going on against me and people were afraid that they might be enveloped in this thing, and they didn’t want to be. It was very interesting to see how that developed. But the minute that the word got out that I had received the exculpatory CIA letter, I was fine again, I was their buddy again. I even got applause when I reported that the hearings were going nowhere. But it told me something about what happens in a witch hunt and how people react against an accused person. An accusation is made whether there is anything there or not.

**RITCHIE:** Two things stood out from that campaign finance investigation. One was that Senator Thompson came in with this reputation as an investigator and people expected him to be an investigator, but he turned out to be not a very good investigator.

**WEISS:** That’s true, but part of his problem was he didn’t really have much on the Democrats that the Republicans didn’t also do. I remember being interviewed by Elizabeth Drew, who wrote a book about the investigation, and I told her, “You know, they’ve put us in the position of defending the indefensible,” because I couldn’t defend what the Clinton campaign had done in terms of the raising of money. It was a scandal in terms of the way the system was supposed to work. But the Republicans did exactly the same thing. It’s the system that’s the problem, and that’s why you need to reform the system. You can’t fix it by going after a few Democrats who raised money in a questionable way. Everybody has been doing it. That doesn’t make it right. It *is* wrong, but we weren’t going to let the Republicans give the country the impression that the Democrats are wrong but the Republicans are okay. We wanted to do an investigation that would show that the system had to be reformed, but all the Republicans wanted to do was a partisan investigation to tar Democrats.

In that respect, I was disappointed with Elizabeth Drew, who I had always admired. She could have written a book telling what’s wrong with the system and using the investigation as an example of how the need for reform is subordinated to partisan

investigations. Instead, she decided to write a gossipy book.<sup>3</sup> She was sitting in Fred Thompson's office while he was making phone calls to Glenn, and then she was reporting on the conversation from Thompson's perspective. Her book came out and really was a slam against Glenn, but I think she was partly disappointed because the hearings turned out to be such a bust and as a result her book really didn't sell many copies. Moreover, some things she said in it were totally wrong. She implied that we were coordinating our strategy with the White House, and that I was talking strategy with a White House staffer named Don Goldberg. Goldberg did call me, perhaps twice during the hearings, but I never talked strategy with him and he never offered any suggestions as to what we should do.

**RITCHIE:** The other part of it was that Senator Glenn came off very well in those hearings. People were, I think, surprised when such a mild-mannered, low-keyed centrist of a senator defended his party so ferociously.

**WEISS:** Yes, he did. And it was very appropriate. I don't want to say I take any credit for it, but Bob Novak said it was my fault, and I wouldn't want to contradict a right-wing pundit, would I? I'll give you another story about this. A few months before, I guess it was during the primary season in 2000, [George W.] Bush was going against McCain at that point, and for reasons which I will never understand I got invited to a dinner sponsored by the Hoover Institution, which was funny in itself. When I went to this dinner there was a receiving line. When I got to the director of the Hoover Institution, I introduced myself. I said, "I'm Len Weiss. I work for John Glenn." He had a smile on his face as he was grabbing my hand. As soon as I said I worked for John Glenn, the smile disappeared and then he went on to the next person. I was laughing to myself, he's obviously thinking: "How the hell did this guy get an invitation to this dinner?" (laughs)

At this dinner was a friend of mine named Henry Sokolski, who has become fairly well known in nonproliferation circles, and happens to be a conservative Republican. I saw Henry and he said, "Oh, I'm sitting at this table over here. Why don't you join me here?" I said fine. I went over and sat down. I'm sitting next to Henry, and on Henry's other side is Martin Anderson. Martin Anderson at that point, I think he may even have been the campaign chairman for the Bush campaign. I'm not quite sure but he had a high-level position, and he had been the number three man in the Reagan administration. Henry introduces me to Martin Anderson, and he says, "You know, you owe this guy something." Anderson says, "Oh, what?" Henry says, "He destroyed Fred Thompson's presidential ambitions and left a clear field for George Bush." (laughs) I was amused by that.

<sup>3</sup>Elizabeth Drew, *The Corruption of American Politics: What Went Wrong and Why* (Secaucus, N.J.: Carol Publishing Group, 1999).

**RITCHIE:** They really were a disaster for Senator Thompson in a lot of ways, and it was surprising that he approached it in such a partisan way that he riled up one of the least partisan senators against him.

**WEISS:** He did everything possible to make it bad. I got an article planted in a Conde-Nast publication, what was it?

**RITCHIE:** *Vanity Fair*?

**WEISS:** *Vanity Fair*. A reporter from *Vanity Fair* was at the hearings and wanted to talk to me. I ended up telling this reporter the whole story about the meetings with Thompson, about how Thompson was after me, about how he was running these hearings in a totally partisan way.<sup>4</sup> They had a big picture of Glenn and Thompson along with a big-print quote from me, but without using my name, that Thompson didn't treat Glenn with respect, and even treated him with disdain. It was clear to everyone that this was the case, and as a result Glenn was very upset with Thompson during the whole time.

I'll tell you someone else Glenn was mad at: he was mad at Joe Lieberman. Glenn and Lieberman did not get along very well. On the surface they were cordial to one another, but in private—I don't know what Lieberman would say about Glenn in private but Glenn certainly was very critical of Lieberman in private, and justifiably so. Lieberman played a really despicable game during those hearings. That was when he was trying to create this persona of being above politics. He would not defend the Democrats. Even when the Republicans attacked the Democratic Leadership Council, of which he was president at the time, he would not answer the attack. That really shocked me. He would not answer an attack on his own organization because he had this other political game he was playing. It got to the point where Glenn told me that he was convinced that anything he would say at the hearing, Lieberman would say the opposite, just in order to make clear that he was opposed to what Glenn was doing.

We tried to fix it in a way. At one point, there was some really outrageous thing which the Republicans had said which we were able to knock down. We wanted to get some press attention on this, so Glenn took Lieberman by the arm and said, "I've got some reporters out here to talk about what we just talked about here in the hearing, would you come with me?" Lieberman clearly did not want to do it, but he couldn't say no at that point so he went. But it was the only time they were together on it. Otherwise Lieberman was not—and all the other Democrats were mad at him, too. I remember Carl

<sup>4</sup>Jacob Weisberg and Bryan Burrough, "High Noon," *Vanity Fair* (July 1997), 82+

Levin saying something to the effect: “Well, Joe Lieberman is a friend of mine, but there are times when I just feel like hauling off and belting him.”

**RITCHIE:** Well, it’s almost noon and I have more questions to ask. I was hoping I could come back next week.

**WEISS:** I would think this is punishment for you.

**RITCHIE:** No, no, this is fascinating. We’re dealing with things that I observed from the outside, so I’m really interested in hearing the inside story. That’s the reason we do these interviews.

**WEISS:** All right.

### **End of the Third Interview**

## CONGRESSIONAL TRAVEL

### Interview #4

November 4, 2004

**DONALD RITCHIE:** I noticed that you had some connection with the line-item veto in the 1980s.

**LEONARD WEISS:** That's true, yes I did.

**RITCHIE:** I wondered what was your interest in that issue?

**WEISS:** We were very much concerned with the line-item veto, especially after Ronald Reagan got elected. We saw that as a tool by which Reagan would be able to pick and choose among social programs in order to reduce them or eliminate them, since we were facing massive budget deficits as a result of the tax cuts. And also because at the same time that he wanted to raise the budget for the Department of Defense by a huge amount and would need to find money with which to do it. We knew where Reagan's priorities were and we wanted to make sure, if we could, that he wasn't going to be able to pick and choose among various programs, that he would have to accept a package of one kind or another. The Democrats were prepared to fight to make sure that social programs would not be gutted, so we fought against the line-item veto.

**RITCHIE:** Congress passed it, but the Supreme Court ruled it unconstitutional.

**WEISS:** Oh, that's right. In the end it was the courts that really did it. But we opposed it. I don't remember the vote.

**RITCHIE:** Another issue that I noticed you were dealing with in the committee in the early '90s was that of weapons of mass destruction, which has been much in the news lately, and terrorism, fairly early on. I wondered what the committee's interest was in those issues.

**WEISS:** We were looking at all kinds of ways in which we might get hurt as a result of either nuclear or other weapons of mass destruction being used by other countries. Very early on I thought about the idea of terrorists being able to use nuclear weapons. I was talking a great deal to Ted Taylor, who just died recently. His obituary was in the *Post* the other day. He was a nuclear physicist who worked at Los Alamos for many years and was a world-class bomb designer. In a very famous book called *The Curve of Binding Energy*, by John McPhee, Taylor plays a very prominent role.<sup>5</sup> He

<sup>5</sup>John A. McPhee, *The Curve of Binding Energy* (New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974).

explained to McPhee how nuclear weapons worked and some of the work that he did in making them work better. He helped design small nuclear weapons so that they would fit not only missiles but even in an attaché case. Taylor told me that he had some idea as to how a nuclear weapon explosion could be made in a very crude way. If you could get the material together, the highly enriched uranium or the plutonium, and use water as a moderator for the nuclear reaction, you might be able to cause an explosion by putting the material together appropriately and dropping it into a toilet! Now it turned out, years later, after careful calculations had been done, that the bomb in the toilet wouldn't work.

Also, there was another man I was talking to named Carson Mark, who had been the head of the Theoretical Division at Los Alamos. Mark was not as sanguine as Taylor about the ability of one person to do it, but he thought that a team of about six people with appropriate expertise could probably build their own nuclear weapon if they had the material. Given that fact, it looked like a small group of terrorists might be able to have a nuclear capability. We knew about chemical weapons and biological weapons, and it was clear that was something we had to worry about, but at the time there wasn't a lot of concern about nuclear, because people thought that it was a very advanced technology, it required large amounts of money. It required a large infrastructure to manufacture the material, so how on earth would a small band of people be able to do it? But very quickly, as soon as we started examining the issue, we realized that we were unsure whether there would be a problem for terrorists to get hold of the materials. Certainly they couldn't manufacture the materials, but they might be able to steal it. We started looking at the data coming out of the various establishments where the materials were being made and there were these large amounts of materials, which went under the name of MUF, or materials unaccounted for, which was an item used by DOE ] to balance its books. In other words, they would produce, let's say, highly enriched uranium at a plant and then when they did inventory they would discover that output plus waste did not match input. The question is: where did the material go? What they always did, year after year, was to say, "The material was probably in the pipes somewhere." But when we looked at it we saw that the amount of MUF was so large that somebody on the inside could have extracted many bombs worth of materials and walked off with it, because physical security wasn't as great then as it is now, and therefore it was possible if there was a conspiracy with someone working inside the establishment, that person would be able to pass materials to a group on the outside.

So we got worried about nuclear terrorism, and I recall that we held at least one hearing on that. The nuclear industry, of course, didn't want to hear about it. They said it was nonsense and there's no point in worrying about it. But actually as the years have gone by, we have been vindicated in that now there is a lot of concern about whether terrorists can get their hands on nuclear devices. Now the concern isn't so much that terrorists might be able to make their own devices, although the Aum Shinrikyo group

out of Japan was trying to do that. That was at least 10 years after we did our work. But now people are worried about whether a country that can make nuclear devices might simply hand one off to a terrorist or that terrorists might steal a device. But while terrorism was a concern for us, it wasn't at the forefront of our work. We were much more concerned about what countries were doing, what governments were doing.

**RITCHIE:** Were there other specific issues that you wanted to discuss?

**WEISS:** Not specific issues. I was going to talk more about the various aspects of life on the Hill.

**RITCHIE:** I'd be interested in hearing about that.

**WEISS:** Okay. First I was thinking about congressional travel. I used to take, I would say, at least one trip a year out of the country as an official trip. How that worked was really rather remarkable from my perspective, considering I was an academic beforehand and you had certain controls on what you could do. There are controls in congressional travel, too, but it's much looser than what I was used to. First of all, I was astounded that there was a budget which was maintained by the State Department, where you simply put in for the amount of money you needed in order to take a trip. You were subject to a per diem limit, but it wasn't the per diem limit that federal workers were subject to. It was per diem plus. The plus could be in increments of \$50 a day up to a \$150 a day.

Let's say I was going to Paris. They'd give me the tickets to go to Paris. I'd get to Paris and arrive at a top hotel, which they had booked for me, at a rate which was absolutely unbelievable, by the way, and then I would call the embassy. There was a contact that I was supposed to make. Prior to the trip I would get cables from the embassies in the places I was going to visit, which would tell me who my contact was, with telephone numbers, and whatever appointments may have been set up in advance. When I would get to Paris, I would call the embassy, call my contact and arrange to meet with him or her—usually him—and then he would come and hand me a bundle of money. This was the per diem for my trip, unless I was going to other countries. He would give me the per diem in francs for France. If I was then going to Germany, when I arrived in Germany there would be another contact and he would give me the money in marks. There was always enough. I never ran short. The State Department, through the embassies, would make the appointments. There would be a car available to drive me to wherever I needed to go, and the schedule was really my own. I would ask for appointments to see various people. They would also suggest appointments that I might want to make, and I usually took all their suggestions, so my trips were pretty well scripted. I was usually on the go most of the time, but I always managed to have a couple of days off in order to be able to see some part of the country.

It's one thing for a staff person to travel—and I always liked to travel alone if I could, I just felt freer that way—but occasionally I went with Senator Glenn, and there was one rather remarkable trip that I took with him and three other senators to Southeast Asia. This was in 1984. There were a number of staff people. The other senators besides Glenn were Bennett Johnston, Jim Sasser, and Sam Nunn. Nunn was the leader of that group. They took their wives with them as well, so the four senators and the four wives went on this trip. I was there as a staff person along with Frank Sullivan and Arnold Punaro, who were with the Armed Services Committee at the time and worked for Nunn, and then there was a long-time aide to Bennett Johnston who worked on the Energy Committee, and Sasser must have had someone, too, but I can't remember who that might have been.

It was a long trip. We started off from Andrews Air Force Base. We flew to Ireland. We were in Dublin for a couple of days—I have a story about that, too. From Dublin we flew to Oman and were there for about a day, and from there we went to India, we went to Pakistan, then Nepal, and finally to Hong Kong, and flew home from there through Alaska back to Washington. The trip to Nepal, which was not part of the trip with a huge policy focus, nonetheless made a really big impression on me.

The trip was supposed to be mostly about India and Pakistan because it was at the time when we were very concerned about the Pakistanis making nuclear weapons. This was 1984, so it was just a few years before they actually made the bomb. They were in the midst of doing that, and we knew it. At each stop we would get briefed by people from our embassy, foreign service officers or the ambassador usually, who would tell us what was going on in the country at that moment, what the concerns were, and just as with my own personal trips they would always provide some suggestions about issues to raise with the foreign leaders that the U.S. was concerned about. Of course, when we went to India and to Pakistan we talked mostly about the nuclear issue, although there was also a lot of talk about things that those governments wanted from us in the way of arms and other trade.

In Pakistan, we not only went to the capital, Islamabad, but we also visited Rawalpindi, where the nuclear establishment was, although we didn't go to any of the plants there. There was a meeting with President Zia of Pakistan, which I attended. I attended one meeting with him. There was another meeting which only the senators attended. Then the Pakistanis drove us to the northwest area because the war was going on in Afghanistan at that time with the Soviets. There were all these refugees who were coming across the Afghan-Pakistani border into the northwest territory of Pakistan, Baluchistan, and so all of the senators, and the staffs, and the wives, went into this caravan of cars and were driven from Peshawar up these mountain roads to pretty close to where the border was with Afghanistan, not far from the Khyber Pass. The senators,



Glenn in particular, wanted to get much closer. We were a few miles away and he wanted to go right up to the border. The Pakistanis said it was too dangerous because the Russians had helicopter gunships that were operating in the area and there was concern that they might end up in the middle of a firefight somewhere!

They put on a show for us. At the border areas, we met with a group of mullahs from the Mujahidin, who were fighting the Russians. I was really very much impressed by what I saw there. I started off the trip somewhat skeptical about the Mujahidin in the first place, because the administration was clearly turning a blind eye to the Pakistani bomb because of the desire to provide weapons to the Mujahidin through Pakistan, which I talked about before. But now when I actually saw the leaders of the Mujahidin it really turned me off, because there were all these mullahs wearing these fine fabrics. They had put up a tent under which the mullahs were sitting, because it was pretty hot. They erected a makeshift little platform for the senators to stand up and give a talk to the mullahs. I remember Sam Nunn in particular, who was the leader of the delegation, stood up on this platform and he addressed them and referred to them as being freedom fighters.

Now, I'm standing on the sides outside the tent, and when I looked back, I could see the entrance to a medical facility where the wounded were being brought who were fighting on the other side of the border. But the medical facility was also being used to handle some refugees. There were these refugees sitting outside this facility on the ground, waiting to get in, because there was a crowd of people and it was a small facility. Most of the people sitting outside on the ground were women and children. The women were all wearing burqas, so it was my first experience in seeing women in burqas. The clothing that they were wearing was ragged and filthy, and they looked terribly poor. So I'm seeing that scene at the same time I'm seeing these mullahs with these turbans and these flowing silk garments sitting under this tent—the women were not under any tent, they were out in the sun. It made a big impression on me. I was appalled by the speeches that were being given by the senators to this group.

We talked to the army folks who were telling us about what was going on. Oh, by the way, when we went in the caravan from Peshawar, up these mountain roads, every hundred feet, I would estimate, there was an armed guard on both sides of the road. Every hundred feet! (laughs) That made an impression on me, too. We were near the Khyber Pass, and Glenn wanted to go to the Pass, but we never made it. They talked to us about what was going on, what they needed in terms of equipment. They had some of the men put on a martial dance for us. Everybody got gifts. I have a knife in a sheath—I got a cheap one, the senators got a very fancy, expensive one—and the wives got garments and other stuff, including rugs. That's another aspect of the trip that I ought to talk about.

While we were in Islamabad, we had an interesting meeting with the ambassador, who at the time was Dean Hinton, a man who I really liked, although I thought he was one of the most cynical people I've even run into—maybe that's why I liked him, I don't know. (laughs) His politics were a lot different from mine. After all, he was an appointee of the Reagan administration, but he was an honest person. We had a meeting with him and then Hinton, Nunn, Glenn, and I had a meeting with a man named Munir Khan, who I had met in the United States once earlier, because he was the head of the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission, and therefore used to go to international meetings on nuclear energy. But he was also engaged in the Pakistani weapons program. We wanted to meet with the famous A.Q. Khan, whose name everybody knows now but hardly anybody knew then, but we couldn't get a meeting with him. We didn't know it at the time, but Munir Khan and A.Q. Khan were bitter rivals, both wanting credit for helping Pakistan get the bomb.

We had this meeting with Munir Khan and he just spent the entire meeting lying to us. I was really prepared for this meeting. Nunn didn't really say much. Glenn had a long memo I had given him and raised some important issues. Hinton let us take the lead. I knew a lot because I had all the clearances and I had received many intelligence briefings. So every time Munir Khan talked about what they were or were not doing, I was able to counter it. My name ended up in the cables that came back, which was interesting. The senators were more circumspect, and Hinton also did not say very much, but it was clear they were perfectly happy to have me, in essence, tell this guy he was lying. They didn't want to tell it to him to his face, but I had no compunction about contradicting his propaganda.

Then we went on to India and that's where I met this man Arunachalam, who I now have met in the United States. He was the deputy defense minister at the time, a very smart man. I was very impressed with him. He talked mostly about conventional arms that the Indians wanted to get from the United States, including harpoon missiles and things of that nature. They didn't want to talk about the nuclear issue at all, but we raised it anyway, and of course, got nowhere in terms of any Indian commitment on nonproliferation.

Then we went on to Nepal. I remember there was a party at the ambassador's house, which I attended. The embassy had arranged for us to meet with a Peace Corps contingent in Nepal. The meeting took place in the evening, at the hotel where we were staying. The head of the Peace Corps in the region came to the meeting, and she brought with her a dozen Peace Corps volunteers who had been working in Nepal from anywhere from 18 months to three years, one of whom was Peggy Udall, the ex-wife of the congressman from Arizona, Mo Udall. She was still friendly with him even though they were no longer married. She was something like 56 years old at the time, and had become

a Peace Corps volunteer, and had been in Nepal for about six months to a year at that point.

The regional head of the Peace Corps just went around the room, asking each of these Peace Corps volunteers to talk about their experience. The experiences were all—there was something similar about each of them in some ways, but the similarity had to do with the amount of effort it took to do what they were doing. One person had to walk for two or three days to get to the village where he or she was working. Those were the kinds of stories we were hearing. Then they were asked, “Tell us about your health situation.” All of them had suffered from either malaria or some other disease, like dysentery or giardia. It was horrendous to hear. Now we were sitting in this fancy room, and the senators are there with their wives, and the wives are all wearing jewelry, some dripping with diamond earrings and necklaces, they’re all gussied up for this meeting. I think it was Bennett Johnston who asked, “After hearing all these stories, what can we do for you? What are you getting paid for this?” One of them said something like \$30 a month. He was just horrified by this and he said, “We can go back and raise the amount of money.” They said, no, it didn’t matter, because, “What would we spend it on?” There was nothing to buy out there anyway.

Then Mo Udall’s ex-wife made a little speech. It still chokes me up. She talked about how poor and how needy the Nepalese were, and how difficult it is to get people to understand the situation, and how these young people were risking their health to be there. And she then thanked everybody for coming. And she said how important it was to them that we came. [Long pause] This happens every time I tell this story. When I talked to Glenn afterwards, I told him how I was on the verge of tears, and he said the same thing happened to him.

**RITCHIE:** Could you tell me more about the substance of what she was saying, and your reaction?

**WEISS:** Well, she was just saying basically how important and difficult the work was, what these young people were doing for the villagers, how the villagers were living, how little they had, how they lacked the most basic elements of life, how their children were dying from lack of knowledge of basic hygiene. Maybe it was the juxtaposition of that with the opulence of the room we were in that just got to me.

**RITCHIE:** You said that you talked to Senator Glenn about it. Do events like that really impress the senators? Are they getting much out of these trips?

**WEISS:** I don’t know. I just don’t know. You can’t tell from looking at the record, because senators and congressmen tend to vote against foreign aid. It’s not a big thing to them, their constituents don’t care about it. In fact, there is great opposition to

foreign aid among the general populace. The assumption is that it's just money that's thrown down the tube, that there are all these ungrateful foreigners out there, we give them this money and they don't like us anyway. Does it register? I can't tell. It seemed to register with Glenn. What did he do about it? Not very much. He's always been an internationalist. He was a supporter of foreign aid, but his interests focused more on military assistance than humanitarian assistance. I have no reason to think that any of the senators were other than decent men, but none of them went out of their way to become a champion for foreign assistance, as for example the congressman from Ohio who worried about world hunger and made a crusade out of it, and really devoted a lot of time to doing something about raising money to deal with hunger in other countries, as well as in the United States. Nothing like that occurred with these guys.

In fact, and this is another aspect of the trip, it was also a shopping trip. They had their wives with them and I saw how that worked. They went to fancy stores wherever we landed, if at all possible. A lot of Waterford crystal was bought in Ireland, for example. We, of course, had military escorts wherever we went. We were flying on a Gulfstream jet, which was one of the planes that the secretary of defense has access to and that was made available for this trip. It had the fanciest and most comfortable seats I've ever experienced on a plane. There was a military crew who waited on us hand and foot, and among them were escorts who came off the plane with us and traveled with us wherever we went, carrying with them, among other things, coolers with various kinds of beverages that the senators would like to have. They would set up a nice breakfast every morning in one of the rooms in the hotel so we didn't have to mingle with the hoi polloi. Then we'd go to nice dinners, and they paid for everything. The military guys carried the money. The senators didn't handle money, the money was handled by the military guys. Now, this money came from appropriated funds for travel, but I never saw any transfer of cash going directly to the senators. That doesn't mean it didn't happen.

I assume that personal purchases were made by the senators from their own personal funds, but I never went shopping with the wives, so I don't know exactly how that was handled. The nature of the purchases was amazing to me. Jim Sasser's wife loved furniture. Now, a Gulfstream jet is not a huge plane. It's not like a commercial carrier, but it's relatively spacious for a small group. It had at least four, or maybe six, bunk beds on it, which were taken advantage of by at least a couple of the people when we were flying over the Atlantic, for example, and then maybe when we flew to Asia, but by the time the trip ended, the bunks were full of gifts and purchases. The military guys were the ones who carried the purchases onto the planes. In other words, the senators or their wives would go shopping, and somebody would accompany them. They never had to carry the purchases themselves. The military people would take the purchases to the plane and load them onto the plane. By the time the trip was over, the bunks were just loaded with these packages, including articles of furniture that Sasser's wife had

purchased. I mean, there was a couch there! There were chairs! The bunks were full of this stuff. Some of it was now in the aisles. I remember I sat in a nice chair going over. Coming back I tried sitting in the same chair, and I could just barely fit into it but I couldn't swivel it because there were all these packages blocking it. (laughs)

As we were flying home, I began to wonder how Customs deals with this stuff? And I found out. We landed at Elmendorf Air Force Base in Alaska at something like three or four in the morning. We landed to refuel, but a guy came on board and said, "There's a Customs agent who is going to come on and he wants everybody to fill out the forms about what they've purchased." I could see a look of consternation on the part of some of the wives that a Customs agent was coming on board, when it was clear thousands of dollars of items had been purchased on this trip. Somebody said something, I don't remember who, about being somewhat outraged at this, but nonetheless it was done. I don't know what valuations were put on, or whether in fact any money changed hands, or anything of that nature. But it also sort of opened my eyes to what senatorial travel abroad is like. It was the only time that I had traveled abroad with senators and wives, so it was a very different experience.

**RITCHIE:** When you're traveling with a group like that did you generally do a report when you came back?

**WEISS:** I did a report whenever I came back from one of my personal trips, when I went alone, but it wasn't that much of a report. I would do maybe a two-page report, unless there was something that I discovered that was of particular interest. Then I would write something up about that. The only time I ever wrote a longish report was when we were in the minority. The first time I traveled as a minority person when Bill Roth was the chairman of Governmental Affairs, I proposed to take this rather long trip to Europe to hit a number of the nuclear centers there. Roth obviously was not used to having any of his staff travel by themselves, so he questioned it. I had Glenn talk to him. Glenn would always let me do it, so Roth said okay. But his staff director said that Roth wanted me to write a report about this trip. I wrote at least a 20-page report and gave it to them. Maybe like three or four months later, I had occasion to talk to his staff director about something or other. We were friendly. And I said, "By the way, did Senator Roth ever read the travel report I made?" (laughs) And he said, no, he didn't think so. They were just having me write a report for the sake of writing a report. I didn't care.

The other aspect of congressional travel I think I ought to mention is foreign trips that are sometimes available to staff people, sponsored by private organizations [that are thinly disguised agents for a foreign country]. I took four of those. Two of them were to China, one to Taiwan, and one to Israel. In each case, the trips were sponsored by a non-profit organization in the United States, but it was obvious that the funds were coming

either from a government or an organization supporting the aims of that government. The trips were for congressional staff people, who were carefully picked as people who had some professional connection to issues which the country being visited was interested in. The notion of the trip was supposed to be for us to meet with various people so that there would be exchanges of ideas. They were very nice trips. I paid for nothing. All expenses were taken care of by the sponsoring organization.

The objective was obviously to try to put us in a better frame of mind regarding the country being visited and various policies that they follow. In the case of China, they had us talk to people where we could raise the way they were carrying out the one-child per family policy, for example, or other things that were of concern to some U.S. policymakers. They always provided the smoothest talking people that they could find to answer our questions. There was no doubt about what the purpose of the trip was from their perspective. It was so that you would be a little more friendly to that country, presumably, after the trip. And it works to some extent. On one of the China trips, I was with a couple of people who thought Mao Zedong had been the devil incarnate when he was alive, and who were definitely unfriendly to the Chinese government. As the trip went on, they looked around and all of a sudden started pointing out all these things that showed that the Chinese were turning toward capitalism, and their attitude to the Chinese government changed as the trip proceeded. It was kind of funny to watch.

[The Israeli trip, which occurred around 1990, was interesting in that they arranged for us to hear a variety of points of view of Israeli journalists and Knesset members, not just hard-liners (all of whom seemed to be of American origin). We did get a talk by Benjamin Netanyahu who was a deputy minister at the time. He made the case for Israel keeping the West Bank as a “buffer” against a possible Arab army invasion. When I asked him how useful a “buffer” would be if the Arabs obtained nuclear weapons and missiles, he said: “We know what the Iraqis are doing and we’re not afraid because Arab leaders know that if they were to attack us with weapons of mass destruction they would be committing suicide, and no Arab leader wants to commit suicide.” Somehow this message escaped the George W. Bush Administration when they were planning to attack Iraq and remove Saddam Hussein a few years later.]

**RITCHIE:** Do you think trips like that help in the sense that Americans tend to be a bit parochial and it’s a chance to see the world from another perspective, even if the other government might be paying for it?

**WEISS:** Well, yes and no. I would say that anything that exposes a provincial American to another culture is all to the good, but the atmosphere of congressional travel is so artificial that I really don’t know how broadening it is—I mean, I’ve done a lot of travel on my own to Europe and Asia, both before I worked in the Senate and now of

course since, and none of my experiences in traveling on my own were like the experience of traveling officially. It is so artificial, it's almost like going to a theme park. You're seeing a new scene that's been created, but you're not experiencing reality. You're really just seeing it from afar. That's why the Nepal experience was so powerful, because it wasn't just a matter of what you saw—you did see poverty, of course, grinding poverty everywhere you looked—but when you had people who were living there who could speak to you in your own language and tell you what they were doing and feeling, and how it was affecting them, and the daily toll of poverty on the people in their villages, and the failure of rich societies to do what ought to be done, putting those things together really made a huge impact. I didn't get the same impression when I traveled in China, for that reason. We were traveling through villages. Yes, I saw poverty, and I was saddened by it, but I couldn't talk to these people. I didn't know what they thought about their lives, and there wasn't anyone traveling with me who could enlighten me. Under such circumstances it takes empathy to provide a significant broadening experience, and many congressional travelers don't have it. But it's better than nothing.

What else did I want to say about congressional travel? There was one other thing. I became aware that some, perhaps most, Foreign Service officers who are responsible for dealing with us *hate* the task. They really hate it. They wouldn't show it when I was traveling with senators, but when I was by myself I saw evidence of it. I would call up and say, "I'm here," or I would call from the United States to make the contact before I arrived, and it was sometimes clear that the guy on the other end thought I would be a terrible nuisance and he wished I would go away. (laughs) But I had one interesting experience in that respect when I went to Switzerland and my contact there was a man named Sherman Hinton, who was either a brother or a relative of Dean Hinton, the ambassador to Pakistan. Sherman Hinton was a Foreign Service officer dealing with science matters in our embassy in Switzerland. I met him in the United States once earlier, so he knew about me, but we didn't know each other, we just met casually. I had had some run-ins with the Swiss over their nuclear assistance to Pakistan and their own nuclear program, which called for the eventual use of plutonium, so Hinton's attitude toward me may have been that I was a pain in the neck on nuclear issues. He may have assumed that, like most congressional people, I was ignorant about nuclear science and technology.

Based on my first contact with him when I arrived, I got the impression that he was prepared not to like me, but when we met I told him one of the things I wanted to do was visit CERN, which is the Center for Nuclear Energy Research in Geneva. Fine, he set up the appointment and he accompanied me to CERN. I spent the entire day there, because I could converse with the scientists there about what they were doing. This was not about proliferation, this was about nuclear science. He ended up being impressed that I really did know nuclear science, number one, and that I wasn't just interested in coming

to make trouble of some sort but I was really learning something and I was bringing some perspectives about nuclear science in America to the people who were working at CERN. The reason I know this is because he sent a very nice cable to Washington, that I got a copy of, that said that this was the best meeting in CERN that he had attended in the three years that he had been there and he was really pleased that I had come to visit. What that basically told me was that some embassy personnel assume that when a staffer or a senator is coming to visit, he's going to be more trouble than he's worth. And some of them have trouble hiding it!

**RITCHIE:** They must deal with some very imperious personalities.

**WEISS:** Oh, imperious is the word. When I traveled, I always encouraged the presence of foreign service personnel at my appointments. They were doing me a favor by making appointments for me, but I always wanted to do them a favor at the same time, in the sense of helping them meet people they would have trouble meeting because they were lower-level foreign service officers. So I would ask them when I would come: "Besides the appointments I have requested, is there anyone you want to see that maybe I can help you get to see?" They would give me a couple of names and I'd say, "Fine, make an appointment and I'll go to those meetings and you come with me." That worked out very well, so they were generally pleased that I had come.

**RITCHIE:** Were most all of your trips dealing with nuclear issues?

**WEISS:** Yes, I would say most of them. Occasionally there would be other kinds of trips. I took a couple of trips that dealt with just science and technology issues. I think I took one that involved operations of government, perhaps one on economics, but mostly it was the nuclear business. I discovered that I couldn't really get all the information that I needed by being in the United States alone. I could call a desk officer or somebody in the State Department and get a briefing, or call the CIA and get a briefing, but it was different than actually going over and talking directly to people. You get nuances which you don't get by having it filtered through somebody else. Either they miss it or misinterpret it or simply have a different interpretation than you have of what people are saying. Doing it directly I found extremely useful so that's why I used to travel as much as I did. I was sorry I wasn't a staffer on the Foreign Relations Committee, because that would have given me a lot more access to a lot more people. But this way it just meant that I had to jump through a couple of extra hoops in order to be able to get a trip approved.

**RITCHIE:** On the other hand, you probably would have had to travel with senators a lot more on the Foreign Relations Committee.



**WEISS:** Yes, exactly right, that was the one great thing about John Glenn. I was able to take those trips on my own, which meant I could raise the issues that I thought were important in a way that I felt was most effective. I didn't have to have it filtered through anyone or treat it with someone else's notion of diplomacy. I could be blunt if I wanted to be. It worked out really well.

**RITCHIE:** The first vacation I took after I went to work for the Senate was in 1977. I had worked for a year pretty solid, and we were in Sausalito, California, in a beautiful hotel up on top of a hill. I remember sitting back at brunch and saying, "I feel like I'm a million miles away from the United States Senate." And just then John Glenn and his wife and children walked right by our table on their way to their table. They were on their way to China. I decided you can't escape the U.S. Senate.

**WEISS:** Exactly right. Another thing I wanted to talk about was our relationship with Bennett Johnston, who I mentioned earlier. Johnston was to some extent a burr under my saddle because first of all he was extremely smart, he was very pro-nuclear, and pretty much opposed to most of the things that we were doing in the nuclear area. He knew his business, unlike a lot of other senators. He had a smart staff, but he was as smart as his staff, and maybe smarter. He was a lawyer and so when it came to legislation dealing with energy matters, and particularly nuclear energy matters, Johnston knew what was in those bills. Very unusual for a senator. One of the things that I discovered very quickly when I went to work in the Senate was how superficial their knowledge frequently was, even of matters on stuff that they were voting on, sometimes even of matters that they were sponsoring. But Johnston was not like that. He knew his stuff.

There was one floor debate that I was involved in with Glenn and Johnston and his staff on an amendment that we had introduced dealing with nuclear waste. Johnston was opposed to it and was arguing against it. The amendment, as I recall it, had to do with some aspect of a larger bill which Johnston was managing. He knew this bill backwards, forwards, and upside down. He understood the amendment we were offering better than Glenn did. Nonetheless, there was a debate going on on the floor, and Johnston was an excellent debater with a debater's bag of tricks. Johnston understood that if he were to ask a question on the floor about a particular detail of a bill, only someone with detailed knowledge of that bill would be able to answer it. And he would pick something that an opponent would be unable to answer, suggesting that his opponent's knowledge of the issue was lacking. So he asked Glenn a question which would have been difficult for Glenn to answer, and whose answer would have undermined Glenn's argument. But instead of finessing Johnston's gambit, Glenn tried to answer it anyway and he gave an answer which was totally off the wall. I was sitting there. He was standing and answering Johnston's question that involved knowing and interpreting a particular section and a particular paragraph. I was thinking to myself: "Oh, my God, what a

disaster. He's given an answer which is obviously wrong and Johnston is just going to destroy him." It didn't happen. Johnston understood that the answer was totally wrong, but he didn't take the advantage of telling Glenn that he was wrong and embarrassing him by giving the correct answer, which would have shown that Glenn really didn't understand what his own amendment would do in detail. All Johnston did was smile and make a comment that the answer was incorrect, but he didn't pursue it. I took it as an example of senatorial decorum, where members of the club did not embarrass each other. At least that was the way they behaved in those days.

I don't know if that would happen today, but it did at that time. So we got our amendment in, even though Johnston opposed it. He voted against it, but the Senate supported Glenn. But that told me something about Bennett Johnston. He was smart but not ruthless. He knew how to play the game. I was always sorry he was hardly ever on our side. (laughs) But I had a good personal relationship with him.

**RITCHIE:** Senators Glenn and Johnston were both considered moderate Democrats.

**WEISS:** Well, Johnston was definitely much more conservative than Glenn was. Johnston was conservative both on fiscal and on social matters. Glenn was conservative on fiscal matters but not on social matters. On social matters he was really a liberal.

**RITCHIE:** But perhaps if he had been from a different party, Senator Johnston might have been more likely to respond more sharply.

**WEISS:** Maybe, that could well have been the case. Well, just to show you the power that Johnston had, there was an issue that had to do with Governmental Affairs. Bob Dole had introduced an amendment, on government regulation procedures, and the Democrats filibustered it. Bob Dole was the majority leader at the time and Johnston was working with the Republicans on it. The amendment would have made the promulgation of new regulations much more difficult, and could have resulted in the withdrawal of existing ones. Most Democrats were really worried about this amendment, particularly because of its possible impact on health and safety protections. But Dole had couched the language in sort of a benign way so that it wasn't obvious to lay people what the result of this would be if it passed. The Democrats decided to filibuster it. There were something like three or four Democrats who were either for Dole or were on the fence. One of them was Bennett Johnston, he was for Dole. The Republicans thought so much of Bennett Johnston and his ability to understand a regulatory issue in particular that he carried the argument for them on this amendment. It was a Dole amendment opposed by most Democrats, the vast majority of Democrats, but Johnston was carrying Dole's water and Dole didn't even argue the case. They turned the whole thing over to Johnston on the floor, and he carried the ball for the Republicans.

Dole called for three votes over a period of a couple of weeks to try to invoke cloture, and they all failed by one vote. We managed to get Jay Rockefeller, who was always a problem when it came to government regulation. He was on the fence on this amendment and it was only because he was being told by the Democratic leadership that his vote would make the difference. He wasn't willing to give the Republicans a victory based on his vote, so he voted with the Democrats not to invoke cloture. After failing on three votes, they gave up on trying to get it passed.

**RITCHIE:** Well, that brings up the point of leadership. You were on the floor a lot and got to see a lot of the floor leaders on both sides.

**WEISS:** I did.

**RITCHIE:** Who were the more effective floor leaders in your time?

**WEISS:** I thought they were all effective. George Mitchell was extremely effective as a floor leader. Tom Daschle was more effective as a floor leader than I thought he would be. When Mitchell stepped down there was a fight that took place over his replacement between Daschle and Chris Dodd. Chris Dodd to me was a known quantity in terms of his ability to debate on the floor, a very smart senator and kind of feisty. I thought he would be an excellent leader. Glenn voted for Dodd, but Daschle won by one vote in the caucus. But boy, I'll tell you, he ran rings around Bob Dole on the Senate floor. I was very surprised. I thought it might be the other way around because Dole had been around a long time, and I had seen him in action as a floor leader, but he was no match for Tom Daschle. Daschle was excellent as a floor leader.

Bob Byrd made terrific speeches, but his effectiveness as a floor leader waned as he aged, though not his effectiveness as a senator. As he got older and no longer needed to worry about his constituency, he ended up taking some positions which would be considered, if taken by other senators, courageous. He turned out in some cases to be the conscience of the Senate, including on this [Iraq] war. I really like Bob Byrd and I'm sorry that we're not likely to have him around much longer.

**RITCHIE:** The interesting thing about George Mitchell was that he looked sort of professorial, but he was a very steely guy.

**WEISS:** Oh, he was a tiger. I saw this in action. He was very sharp with me once off the Senate floor because he was expecting something from Glenn and I hadn't delivered it and he was mad at me. I saw the way he talked to his own staff. He wanted loyalty and competence and wanted it on display at all times, and he got it. He had a very good staff, as did Daschle. So, yes, George Mitchell, as you say, may have looked professorial, but he was really tough minded.

**RITCHIE:** The Republicans considered him a really tough partisan.

**WEISS:** Yes, well, he was. He was a tough partisan, but I don't view partisanship as necessarily being a pejorative word. I think to some extent part of our problems have been that Democrats haven't been partisan enough in some areas. I wish the Democrats acted more like the Democrats of my youth, when the party was much more socially progressive. Partisanship, unfortunately, has been taken to mean ideological rigidity where you refuse to find any kind of common ground with an opponent. There's no need to seek common ground if you have the votes, although you have to be careful not to adopt an attitude of hubris where you rub your opponent's nose in the dirt. But if you don't have the votes, rather than to simply stand and say, "I won't budge," find something good that can be done and then go ahead and do it. I don't consider that an abdication of partisanship. You fight for what you can get.

The problem with the Democrats has been, to some extent, they have sometimes caved in when they didn't have to. They have become too easily intimidated by charges of partisanship or obstructionism, and they haven't been effective in formulating a coherent message that appeals to voters on the national level.

**RITCHIE:** What about the atmosphere in the Senate in the 1990s, especially after the Republicans took over? We talked about Senator Thompson and that one particular case, but was that—

**WEISS:** That was a symptom, not a cause. The Senate that I encountered when I first came was very different from the Senate that was there when I left. I think it was the rise of Newt Gingrich and people of that ilk who made the difference. As to exactly why that happened, people have different ideas. Some people say it was because the Democrats were so terrible in running the House in particular for 35 years, they never let the minority do anything, and they treated the minority badly, so it was payback once they lost the House. But there's more to it than that. Maybe that's an element, but the other part of it is that American politics changed somewhat in that period. American politics has become nastier than it was. Ideological divisions now mean that personal relationships are affected, which was not the case when I first came. When I first came, everybody got along reasonably well. People on the left and people on the right fought for their positions but it didn't affect their personal relationships. That's not true anymore. It wasn't true when I left the Senate.

The atmosphere began changing noticeably when a number of right-wing Republicans came to the Senate from the House. Trent Lott was an example. They had a take-no-prisoners approach to politics, where you sought every single advantage, regardless of its effect on future prospects for cooperation. You just tried to win at every moment and you were willing to say or do anything that would give you an advantage.

That meant that you could stick it to your opponent, even in petty ways, in terms of staffing, budget, space, whatever, it was give no quarter in any way. If they're not with you, they're against you, and therefore anything you do to them is fair game. That's the kind of attitude that some of those folks brought to the Senate from the House. As I say, some people said that was the way the Democrats treated them when the Democrats were running the House, and that's why they had that view when they came over. Well, it's been some years now and I don't think that analysis holds water. I think it's simply a change in ideological passion that has grown up in the country, especially on the right. As to why that has happened, I don't know, but it's not unique in American history. We've seen this in the past as well.

It may have something to do with the cultural divisions that exist within the electorate, and which grew out of the Vietnam War and the civil rights movement. When you listen to talk shows and you hear what people say about others who don't hold their point of view, it's shocking. The notion of good and evil, a religious perspective has now affected politics in a big way. If you have a different political position than someone else, you're viewed not just as a person who has honestly, but perhaps mistakenly, come to a different position, but you are viewed as somebody who is helping evil to win in the world and therefore anything that is done to stop you is fair game. I personally tend to blame it on the influence of a religious sensibility which has infected our politics. I think the most dangerous thing that has happened, which you have now seen in the recent election, to American politics, is the fusion of religion with it. As an irreligious person myself, I really am frightened by what's happening. I see too many parallels with what has gone on in the past elsewhere and with what is going on in other parts of the world today. Religion is driving politics in the Middle East, and in parts of Asia, and it causes trouble. And now it's driving politics in the United States. You have Muslim fundamentalists, Christian fundamentalists, and Jewish fundamentalists all causing political and social problems at the same time in different parts of the world. Maybe it's the accelerating pace of change in the world and the difficulty of people committed to old traditions and societies to adapt to it. But it is certainly affecting politics in our own country.

**RITCHIE:** The other element in the 1990s was the Clinton administration, which got involved in "moral values" in its own way. How did the Clinton administration play out with the Democrats in the Senate, from your experience?

**WEISS:** Like most Democrats, I liked Bill Clinton. My view of him was always: I wish he were a little more courageous and would fight a little harder for what I viewed as the heart of Democratic principles and philosophy, which means liberalism. He was a bit too much of a centrist from my perspective. On the other hand, I appreciated the fact that he was certainly the smartest president in my memory, in terms of sheer intellectual

ability. He was just one terrific politician. After the Democrats lost the midterm elections, when Gingrich became Speaker—

**RITCHIE:** In 1994.

**WEISS:** I went to a Democratic dinner at which Bill Clinton gave a speech. This was at a time when people were asking is Bill Clinton still relevant? He had raised that issue himself. He got up and he made a speech about what he felt his administration had accomplished up to that point. It was just a terrific speech. He had no notes. He just spoke. And he had that crowd in the palm of his hand. People went into that dinner feeling pretty gloomy. They came out of it energized as a result of his speech. That's the way he was. He was maddening in a lot of ways in that he could raise the party up almost by sheer force of will, and intellect, and forensic ability, and then just when the party seemed to be riding high he would do something stupid that would change the whole complexion of the political debate in the United States. I give the Republicans some credit for that. They took what should have been a two-day story at most and turned it into a referendum on a presidency, and made Bill Clinton a pariah within his own party for a while, despite the fact that people really liked Bill Clinton.

That message just never got through to Al Gore when he ran. I'm amazed at all the answers to the question: "Why did Al Gore lose in 2000?" Of course, in my view he didn't lose, he just had it taken away from him by the Supreme Court. But there would have been no challenge if he had simply unleashed Bill Clinton in the campaign. People say Ralph Nader was really to blame because he got 97,000 votes in Florida. My answer to that always has been [that there were a number of actors that could be said to have resulted in Gore's loss independent of Nader, including the failure to utilize Bill Clinton more widely on the campaign trail]. If Bill Clinton had campaigned in Arkansas and maybe a few other states they could have won in those states. So what really caused Al Gore to lose the election?

**RITCHIE:** Especially in narrow elections, every state that's lost could have made the difference.

**WEISS:** Of course. Al Gore, for goodness sake, didn't even campaign sufficiently in his own state of Tennessee and he lost that state. There were lots of things you could point to, errors that were made of various kinds, and now we are paying the price for it. The American people have very short political memories. The fact that the election of 2000 was such a fiasco and that all these policy errors have been made since then didn't count for anything in 2004. It all got trumped by a brilliant campaign of turning people's attention to gay marriage and abortion and things which really do not affect their lives. Why should somebody who lives in the Bible belt give a damn about a gay couple in San Francisco? Or the fact that somebody wants to get an abortion in New

York? On the other hand, if they're living in Appalachia they should give a damn about what the government's policy is with respect to the economy. People are irrational. They end up voting against their own interests sometimes. That's what I think happened in this election because some politicians are so clever. They are able to push an emotional button in people and get them to vote on the basis of an emotional response to an issue as opposed to how their own personal lives will be affected by government policy.

**RITCHIE:** Well, in 1998, Senator Glenn chose not to run for reelection. This seems like a good point to reflect on his career and give a general assessment of what kind of a senator he was over those years.

**WEISS:** He was a very cautious senator, perhaps too cautious. He was very careful in terms of what he said, in terms of how he voted. His courage as an astronaut did not always carry over to his career as a senator. He got a thoughtful letter once from a Soviet citizen saying something critical about the United States. He wrote to Glenn, I assume, because he knew Glenn was a national hero in the U.S., like the cosmonauts in the U.S.S.R. This was an ordinary person, I believe. The letter was given to me for a draft reply. I drafted a response to it. I thought this was an opportunity for Glenn to make a statement about war and peace and the Cold War. This would show a thoughtful and philosophical side to him that the general public didn't see. It was at a time when the Russians were fighting in Afghanistan. So I wrote a draft reply which admitted some U.S. shortcomings but also was very critical of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. And I put something in about how much better the world would be if the Soviet Union and the U.S. were to concentrate on fighting our common enemies: poverty, ignorance, disease, environmental degradation, and that's really where we ought to find our common ground and work together, instead of trying to fight each other.

I gave it to his press secretary, who thought it was a terrific letter. He called me up to compliment me and said he was going to try to get Glenn to send it, because he thought it would be a good press story. Glenn would not sign the letter. Not because he necessarily disagreed with its content, but basically, I think, he was afraid of sending a letter to a Soviet citizen and having the Republicans make something out of it in Ohio, that he's corresponding with some Soviet Communist and maybe going soft on the Cold War. That was an example of his cautiousness.

By the way, I also should say I have nothing but good things to say about him as a boss, really, but that is not to say he didn't make some mistakes. I've already said earlier that he was a terrible manager. He put people in positions of authority in his office and on his personal staff who in no way, shape, or form should have been there. He had this really strange relationship with his last administrative assistant, who is still with him, by the way, she's out in Ohio State on their payroll, helping him in some fashion, Mary Jane

Veno. It was an example of how he could sometimes be pushed around by strong women. Her strength wasn't in that she had a strong personality, it was that she appeared vulnerable. She would cry at the drop of a hat, and he just couldn't take that. She even once said to me, when I was trying to get him to do something and I couldn't, "I'll take care of it. I'll argue, I'll cry, and he'll do it." (laughs) And that's the way she sometimes got things done.

He couldn't fire people. It was almost impossible for him. In the whole time I was with him, for over 20 years, I think he fired one person during that period. Working for him for that long gave me the opportunity to watch him grow as a person, not just as a senator. When I first got to know him, I saw how personable he was, and it was no act. He was a genuinely good and kind person. But I discovered after a while that he harbored various prejudices that were the result of his small town upbringing and his insular environment as a result of being a marine for 23 years. Obviously, he did work to try to overcome them. So, for example, his attitude toward women was much different in the Senate than was the case when he was a marine. He realized that women can be smart and can have good political instincts and can do things, and he changed. He hired women in leadership positions on his personal staff.

But there were other prejudices that still needed work, shall we say. I'm going to tell a story, but I'm not sure I'm going to leave it in. This was after I became staff director of the full committee. I don't know what was going on in his life at the time because it came like a bolt out of the blue. I was in his office talking about some issue before the committee. I was also in the process of hiring lots of staff people. When I hired somebody, before I would have it done officially, I would go to him and say, "I want to hire this person, here's his resume." He never said no, except once, and that's another story I'm going to tell. But out of the blue all of a sudden he said to Mary Jane Veno, who was in his office, while I was sitting there, "You know, Len is building a little Tel Aviv down in the Governmental Affairs offices." I wasn't sure how to take that, but assumed it was a bad joke, but she understood what he was saying and she got nervous. She told him, "Don't say things like that," and then she quickly left. But to my amazement, he continued. He told me, in essence, that he thought I was hiring too many Jews on the staff. I was thunderstruck. The first thing that I thought of was, "I'm going to have to resign." Then he compounded it by looking at the list of staff that I had hired and he started going down the list name by name and asking me, "Is this person Jewish?" After about two or three names, I stopped him and told him, "Senator, I'm hiring the people who I think are the best people I can find for the jobs that are open, and I don't care whether they're Jewish or whether they're anything else." But he still wanted to go down the list.



Here things began to get almost comical, or maybe surreal. There was a fellow who I hired who wound up working for Glenn for twelve years, a very nice and extremely smart and hardworking guy named Randy Rydell, who has his own excellent reputation in the nuclear arms control area, he's working at the UN. "Isn't Randy Jewish?" Now, Randy Rydell, in my view, was the quintessential WASP. (laughs) He was blond, soft spoken, and deferential in manner. I forget where he was brought up, but as far as I was concerned, there was absolutely nothing about him that would cause anyone to think Randy might be Jewish. It was clear Glenn hadn't the vaguest idea of who was Jewish and who wasn't, but there was a thing in his head because I was Jewish and I never denied it, I would even crack jokes about it. When it happened I went home and told my wife Sandy about it. She said, "What are you going to do?" I said, "Well, I'm not going to tell anybody about this, but I can't work for somebody who will stop me from hiring someone because he or she is Jewish." So we decided that I would do my job. I would propose hiring whomever I felt was a right choice for a committee staff slot, and if he stopped me from hiring somebody on the grounds that he thought there were too many Jews on the staff, I would quit. That was how we decided to handle it.

One other time, it might even have been the next time that I hired somebody, I brought the person's resume to Glenn. He mulled over the name, and I could tell he was mulling over the name thinking, "Is this person Jewish or not?" But he didn't say anything, and he just said okay, and it never came up again. The funny thing is that a couple of years after that, his daughter became engaged to a Jewish fellow, and I thought, "Wow, I wonder how he feels about that!"

Since this issue never came up again, and I was hiring many people over the years, there must have been something special going on that triggered Glenn's bizarre behavior at that time. I'm only speculating now, but I know that Glenn was very upset at the way in which he was lobbied by AIPAC [American Israel Public Affairs Committee]. He's not the only one in the Senate who felt that way. AIPAC is a very aggressive organization and they have people who are not above making political threats in order to achieve a goal. They are connected to many organizations that raise lots of political money, and they have shown that they have the ability to successfully target politicians whom they view as being unfriendly or insufficiently friendly toward Israel. By the same token, they can flood a campaign fund with cash for politicians who toe the line on the Middle East. They used to come and see Glenn and he sometimes complained about how his arm was being twisted on some issues involving Israel, and it could have been something like that that triggered the episode. I'm speculating. Anyway, you're the first person I have told, besides my wife, about this. As I say, he never acted on it, so in that sense it was a little bit like William Safire's experience with Richard Nixon. Nixon used to say these nasty things about Jews on the tapes, and Safire, who worked as a speechwriter for Nixon, defends him on the grounds that Nixon never really acted on his

prejudices, and one of Nixon's best buddies and advisers was Leonard Garment, who was Jewish. And to make the analogy complete, Glenn's first business partner in Florida was a Jewish Holocaust survivor who got him into the motel business.

**RITCHIE:** What were Senator Glenn's relations with Howard Metzenbaum, the other senator from Ohio?

**WEISS:** Very bad for a while. There was a period where they could not stand each other. Metzenbaum beat Glenn in a primary, and that's really what soured the relationship originally. Metzenbaum lost in the general election, but then there was an opening and he got appointed to the Senate by the governor, something like six months to a year before the next election. Then Glenn challenged him in the primary in the next election and this time Glenn beat him. It was a very nasty political campaign. And then Metzenbaum won an election for the next opening, so they were now both in the Senate, and the relationship between them could hardly be worse for two Democrats from the same state. But their staffs got along well and the staffs in fact looked for ways of trying to ease the tension, because everybody recognized that it was harmful to the Democratic Party for these two people to be at odds. An opportunity came up. Metzenbaum was attacked in an editorial somewhere and was accused of being a Communist sympathizer, a McCarthyist-type attack. Glenn's press secretary got Glenn to go to the floor with a statement defending Metzenbaum, and Metzenbaum thanked him, and that was the beginning of the thaw in their relationship.

Over a period of years after that, they became friends. There remained some reserve on the part of both men. They had gone through too many battles with each other to become close, but they were certainly able to work together. Glenn supported him the next time he ran; he supported Glenn the next time Glenn ran. So from all outward appearances, it had been patched up.

I'm trying to think back, looking at 1987 when this happened, whether something with Metzenbaum was going on, Metzenbaum being Jewish, but I just don't know. It was just bizarre, that's all I can say, it was totally bizarre. But, again, it made me think about Glenn's background, coming from a small town in southern Ohio, and as an institution the marines were notorious for being prejudiced against Jews as well as blacks, so in that sense it was not a surprise.

The only time a prejudice that he had really interfered with a hiring decision was when I wanted to hire a guy to give us additional help on arms control. This fellow was working at a think tank in Washington, and had a Ph.D., very good credentials, had not worked on the Hill but had been doing enough work interacting with people on the Hill that he knew how the Hill worked. I thought he would be a terrific staff member. It was not my highest priority at the time, but I had the money and I wanted to hire him. I

invited him to come and meet Glenn since he was frequently on Capitol Hill. I had to go over to meet Glenn about something or other, so I brought him into Glenn's office where we had a very nice conversation. It wasn't very long but it was long enough. I had more business to do with Glenn, so this guy left. I had given Glenn this guy's resume earlier, and I said, "Well, what do you think? I want to hire this guy." He said, "Oh, I think you ought to hold off on hiring this guy for a while." He didn't say absolutely not, but I understood. When he would say, "not now," or "let's hold off on it," I knew that meant it's a no go.

He said, "You know, this guy is 40 years old and he's never been married." [This was a very strange comment and I was unsure how to interpret it.] And then he added another comment about this fellow's build being "slight." He then repeated, "I'm not quite sure about him, I'd like you to hold off on him." [Glenn's unusual tentativeness and demeanor caused me to think that what I was hearing from him was code.] And I thought, "Oh, no, this is the marine coming out all over again, with small town Ohio prejudice against gays." To tell you the truth, I had no idea whether this guy was gay or not. The thought never even entered my mind until Glenn's comments. Now, the funny part about that is I already had a gay staff member on the staff. I didn't know he was gay when I hired him. I wasn't as sensitive about it then as I became since, along with, I think, a lot of other people. But it didn't matter. At some point I kind of realized it, because he would say things from time to time that suggested it. So it became obvious to me at some point he was gay. So what?

Glenn had at least one person on his personal staff who was gay, but I don't think he knew it. And then it turned out that a young fellow, who had good political connections in Ohio because of his family, was hired by Glenn to work in Glenn's office on some Ohio-related issues, ended up dying of AIDS. Glenn was visibly devastated by this guy's illness and death. [So if Glenn had earlier harbored any anti-gay prejudice, it was gone by this time.] So, as I say, I watched Glenn grow as an individual. He did have some prejudices. But we all have flaws and Glenn, I have to say overall he's a good man.

**RITCHIE:** It's an interesting relationship between a senior staff person and a senator in the sense that as a staff person you can do a lot as long you have the senator's name behind you.

**WEISS:** Right.

**RITCHIE:** On the other hand, you have to get the senator behind you on the issue, and there are obviously going to be points where either you're out ahead or you disagree. There seem to be a lot of compromises that have to be made.

**WEISS:** There are. And that reminds me of a story. He got mad at me once. I was writing a statement for him about some issue. Maybe he was having a bad day, because he usually didn't explode like that, but he looked at my draft and got really mad. He said, "Can't you write something that I would say instead of what you believe?" (laughs) Well, that puts it in a nutshell. There were a lot of times when we disagreed, but I was always careful about representing his position when I would talk to people on the outside. I never represented my position for his. But there were times when I would be invited to give a talk somewhere and if it was clear that the talk was in my name, I would say what I believed that made it clear that I was not talking for Glenn.

I certainly did a lot of things in his name without checking, especially administratively. It was rare for me, actually, to ask him in advance about hiring somebody. I would usually just go and say, "I've hired this person," or "I'm hiring this person." I'd give him a resume to look at as a matter of protocol. He never objected, except that one time.

You asked a previous time about his relationship with other senators. Generally, he was friendly, but there was a certain distance. He did do some socializing with other senators. He bought a boat at one point and occasionally he'd have a party on his boat to which he'd invite other senators. But he never really became a member of the club. Also I had the impression that he was a little concerned about his intellectual standing with respect to his colleagues. He never really finished college. I think he did three years plus and then joined the marines. There was an issue about his becoming an astronaut, because at the time when the astronaut program was begun, you had to have a college education. He didn't have that degree. The way he told the story was he was just one course shy, but it was a little more than that. He had friends in the Marine Corps who intervened for him and helped get him into the astronaut corps. Then when he became a hero after his flight, his old school awarded him a diploma on the basis of his training as a marine and as an astronaut, so he got his college degree.

I don't know what kind of student he was. I never tried to look at his transcripts and never saw any information about it. I always felt he was a smart man. He certainly seemed able to absorb large amounts of information and retain them. He was very good at running a hearing, but I had the impression that he was a little reluctant to engage in give-and-take on the Senate floor with colleagues. I think he felt they were lawyers and he wasn't and he was at a disadvantage of some sort. It would even come out sometimes in a funny way. He would be in a meeting with staff, usually high-level personal staff and myself, and somebody would question something he did, and he'd say, "Oh, yeah, that's because I'm stupid, isn't it?" Or words to that effect, which was an indication to me that he was concerned about what people thought of his intellect. When he ran for president there were some nasty swipes at him in the press. I remember Michael Kinsley once

wrote something about him being a “dim-bulb senator from Ohio.” There was some nasty stuff thrown at him that way.

But he engaged in debate on the Senate floor when he felt he had to, though he didn’t relish it. Sometimes it was funny to watch. In one debate—this was another debate, I think, with Bennett Johnston. I was encouraging Glenn to get into a debate with Johnston on this particular issue, whatever it was, I don’t remember now what it was, but it had to do with nuclear energy. At first he didn’t want to, but then he did. I said, “You have to because you are associated with this issue and you really need to say something about this.” I wrote out some statement for him, and I even wrote out, “They’re going to say this and in return you should say this.” So he began and there was a little bit of give-and-take, and he discovered that the give-and-take was working fine for him. All of a sudden he blossomed before my eyes. He was timid at the beginning and then it was as if he thought, “Oh, I really do have the best argument here.” He did well in the debate and it gave him a great deal of confidence. But you could see the lack of confidence at the beginning and the building of confidence as he went along.

That’s the way he was as a senator. At the beginning of his career he was timid and unwilling to be outspoken. By the time he finished he was a reasonably outspoken senator. Not as outspoken as some, but willing to put himself on the line a lot more than he was at the beginning of his career.

**RITCHIE:** Is there a disadvantage in the Senate of not being a lawyer?

**WEISS:** Yes, there is. A lot of times there are certain legal, technical arguments that come up in connection with legislation that you really need to be able to deal with. I don’t think you necessarily have to be a lawyer, but if you are not a lawyer you have to be involved in a profession which has forced you to really think and speak logically and be reasonably well-read. If you do that, then you are not at a great disadvantage. That was true of me, too. I have no legal background whatsoever, but I discovered very quickly that I was not really at a very great disadvantage with respect to the lawyers who I was dealing with on other staff, because I was a scientist and I was used to thinking analytically and logically about everything that I dealt with, and examine things from different points of view. It came naturally to me. The only disadvantage I had with respect to lawyers was I didn’t know what certain legal terms meant, so the jargon was new to me. But, it doesn’t take that long to learn jargon. The other thing was I didn’t know how to write legislation. Fortunately, there is the Senate Legislative Counsel’s office. They were terrific. I got to know those people very well, and within a year I would say I learned enough that I could write legislation reasonably well, still somewhat clumsily, but I would bring it to them and they would fix it up. That office was really invaluable for somebody who didn’t have any legal training. But that was really for the

purpose of doing the legal boilerplate, which I had no familiarity with. I could even write boilerplate by the time I ended my career in the Senate.

**RITCHIE:** When Senator Glenn chose not to run in 1998, did you think you might stay on with the Senate?

**WEISS:** No, I had decided not to. The last two years, which involved that campaign finance investigation, were so unpleasant from my perspective I did not want to have anything more to do with the Senate. I had enough. I could have stayed on. In fact, someone I knew very well who was a labor lobbyist who I had dealt with on a lot of issues, because of his connection with the postal unions, called me up—I think it was somewhere around December of '98. I was still on the Senate payroll at the time. I was on the payroll but I didn't have any duties at that point. He said John Edwards had just gotten elected and Edwards was in the market to hire a chief of staff, an administrative assistant, and he was looking for a "gray beard." This guy apparently had helped Edwards raise money, and he was helping Edwards put his staff together. He said, "So we thought about you. Would you be interested?" I said no. Of course, I briefly rethought that decision when Edwards was selected to run for vice president. But I told my wife, "If I had taken that job, my guess is I would not have lasted six years, so it wouldn't have mattered anyway."

**RITCHIE:** What did you do once you left the Senate?

**WEISS:** Oh, I really didn't have any plans. I looked around to see if there was a job somewhere, maybe in a think tank, and at that point there just didn't seem to be anything, but I was in no hurry. In fact, I was enjoying the fact that my responsibilities had been lifted from my shoulders and I was basking in the relief. But somewhere around the late winter I went to a meeting in Washington and I ran into a fellow named Ron Lehman, who I had known when he was a staffer on the Senate Armed Services Committee. Ron was a Republican and moved up to become the director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, under George Bush the first. He was now running an internal think tank at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory called the Center for Global Security Research, and they study various problems at the intersection of technology and national security, including proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. So he asked me what I was doing and I said, "At the moment I'm not doing anything. I'm sort of seeing what's out there." He said, "Well, would you be interested in doing some consulting work for this little group that I run?" I said sure, I had nothing else at that point. He said, "Fine, I'll have them draw up the papers."

He knew I was a Democrat he said, but "you always gave me the impression that you were really concerned about the security of the United States, that that was what was motivating you." I said, "Well, that's true, and I always thought the same about you."

(laughs) So we got together and I'm maybe the token liberal in this organization. It actually is a nonpartisan group. The research they do is interesting, and I've written a number of papers for them. They held meetings last year in France and in Japan and I participated in both of those meetings. So I've gotten back to my intellectual roots to some extent, dealing with scientists, only now scientists who are studying national security affairs as opposed to doing pure science. I really like those people. I like that community. I came from it, so I'm perfectly pleased to have gone to back to it. I'm publishing papers, but I'm not as busy as I would like to be at this point. I still have lots of energy, but I have not spent much of that energy trying to find a full-time job.

Unlike a lot of people who have tended to fall apart after they have had a job with important responsibilities and then all of a sudden it's gone, maybe because it was a second career for me, having been an academic for about 14 years before I went to work in the Senate, it didn't seem like such a big deal to me to have gone back to being a solo practitioner in some fashion, and writing my own papers, and doing my own research, and that sort of thing. There are some things about the Senate that I miss, but mostly when I think about the balance sheet of the things that are good about it and the things that I found were negative toward the end, I still come down thinking that I'm better off not being there.

**RITCHIE:** Did you ever have any temptation to go into lobbying?

**WEISS:** No. I can say that I never seriously considered being a lobbyist—I don't want to say I never *thought* about it, but I never pursued it. I felt that I just wouldn't feel good about myself if I were to lobby for a corporation or a business association. There are some things I could lobby for that I would feel good about. I could lobby for an environmental organization or something like that, but even there I had no enthusiasm for the way lobbying is done. If you really want to be effective as a lobbyist you have to toss a lot of money around, and it's a bugbear for me, money and politics. If I had the power I would get all private money out of politics. There should only be public money in politics because that's the only way of guaranteeing an honest vote out of a representational body. The Congress is swayed by money, there's no question about it. I wasn't willing to be part of that system [of trading campaign contributions for access]. I suppose the money would have been nice, if I had become a corporate lobbyist, but I'm not hurting for money, so I'm perfectly happy.

**RITCHIE:** Well, you've certainly seen the institution from some very interesting inside perspectives over the years.

**WEISS:** Yes, I have, and I had great respect for the institution in the early years, but as the time went on the respect went down. I still respect certain individuals, but the institution itself has been badly damaged in some fashion. Some historians say it was

worse in the past at certain times. Maybe that's true. Maybe it's the ethos of the times that we're really talking about, and the institution will come back, if the ethos changes for the better. I'm trying not to be very pessimistic about this past election, trying to put it in some larger context, but my guess is there were people in the election of 1932 in Germany who thought that it was a temporary blip of some kind and there would be no long-time consequences. It turned out that there were pretty serious consequences. I don't want to say that George Bush is Adolph Hitler or anything like that, but I'm really worried about the bar having been lowered so much on civil liberties and the way in which politics is now being played, and also the religious zealotry that is now infecting politics. It's a really volatile mix and I think it's unpredictable as to how it's going to come out. I'm hoping that maybe it's all benign and four years from now things will look differently, but I'm not convinced at this point.

**RITCHIE:** Well, is there anything that we haven't covered today or the last few times that we should have?

**WEISS:** Did we talk about congressional mail?

**RITCHIE:** No, I don't think we did.

**WEISS:** My attitude about congressional mail has changed a great deal as a result of my experience. I used to think congressional mail was really important, that people really paid a lot of attention to congressional mail. Well, of course they do and they don't. Most mail has no effect whatsoever and people are simply wasting their time writing to their representative, except to the extent that it makes them feel good. However, if a congressional office gets a lot of mail on an issue, the numbers can count, providing that it's not an organized mail-in from a group. If it's organized it doesn't have much of an effect. It will register as a blip of some kind, but that's it. If you get a ton of mail coming from all kinds of individuals who are writing out of their personal concerns and in a personalized manner, then the numbers can mean something. I also didn't know about the use of robomachines to generate letters and pantographs to sign. I don't know how they do it now.

**RITCHIE:** It's e-mail now.

**WEISS:** That's right, of course, because my wife writes e-mail messages to our senators and our congressman and I have yet to write one. I know how that system works and there's no point to it. I'm writing to some intern who's going to send me a canned response. But she doesn't care, she writes these letters anyway. She's trying to do something for causes she believes in. So I was a little disappointed to find that congressional mail is not really a very important part of the business except to the extent that it keeps the constituents happy, so that you can get reelected.



**RITCHIE:** It keeps a lot of staff employed.

**WEISS:** Yes, that's right. But they're all low-level staff. One of the perks of a high-level staff job is avoiding having to answer constituent mail. But because of my scientific background, even when I was a senior person, occasionally mail would come to me. It was usually mail that nobody else could answer. I had staff who handled mail that would come to the committee, but every once in a while a letter would come in about a science issue that needed a detailed response, which nobody on the staff could do. This was usually not a matter of my having to explain to a scientist something that was going on and how it fitted in with his research; rather it was usually that some nut had written in which he either has invented something or he has an idea about bizarre experimentation projects that NASA ought to do. I recall one letter asking why don't we have an airplane or a helicopter hover over the earth and just sit there while the earth revolves, and then all one has to do is lower it and you're at another point? A question that shows no understanding of elementary physics. My staff people didn't know how to answer such a question so they would give it to me. In many cases I would have to explain the second law of thermodynamics, or sometimes the first law, to the writer as to why his idea was completely stupid. But he was a constituent from Ohio so you couldn't write back and bluntly say that.

Stephen Young, the senator from Ohio, whose seat I think Glenn took when he got elected, was famous for writing nasty letters back to constituents. There was apparently one form he used to use. As I recall it, if somebody would write him a letter disagreeing with him and berating him for something, he would write a letter back to this person: "Some idiot has written a letter to me and used your name, and I just wanted you to know." (laughs)

**RITCHIE:** It would be nice to answer mail that way.

**WEISS:** I don't have anything else that I can think of.

**RITCHIE:** Well, I really have enjoyed this and learned a lot from it.

**WEISS:** Did you really? I can't imagine that you would have learned that my experience was any different from that of all the other people you've interviewed.

**RITCHIE:** Everybody's experience depends on where they stand, the committee that they serve on, and the issues that they deal with. I just recently interviewed someone who worked in the Legislative Counsel's Office, so he told me the story from the point of view of the guy who gets an amorphous mass of stuff and is told to shape it into a bill. One reason he retired was because every time a staff member had just about learned how

to write a bill, they would leave, and he would have to start all over again with the next person.

**WEISS:** It wasn't Art Rynearson, was it?

**RITCHIE:** It was.

**WEISS:** It was! Oh, my God, he must have been talking about me then. I used to deal with Art all the time.

**RITCHIE:** It's a wonderful interview about crafting legislation, and one of the problems was that people keep demanding changes, so the legislative counsels would wind up doing 40 drafts of a bill, so it was both the frustration of the job but also the satisfaction of being involved in so much significant legislation.

**WEISS:** I have one more story to tell, just one short one. This has to do with the Democratic caucuses that used to go on every week. Every Tuesday there was a caucus meeting in the Lyndon Johnson room. It was a lunch. There would be staff people there, mostly from the leadership, but a few staff people from senators might show up because those senators were going to say something or make a presentation at the meeting. I used to go to a lot of those meetings because Glenn was involved in legislation when he became chairman of Governmental Affairs. He was involved with a lot of stuff that he needed to talk about. The way it works was, the senators sat around a square area. They were on both sides of a table that formed three-sides of a square, with a podium at the front. The staff sat on the outside on chairs, just like in a hearing room. Except there was very little room. You were sort of cramped in because the chairs were so close. The thing is: it's a lunch, but the staff doesn't get lunch, only the senators get lunch. (laughs) So there are these senators sitting and eating their lunch, and the staff is sitting there, we're all hungry, it's lunchtime. Every once in a while—this used to get me—a senator would turn around and literally toss a piece of food at a staff person who was sitting there, you know, like he's a dog and scraps are being tossed at him! (laughs) I thought: the imperial Senate. If reporters could see this in action, what a story this would make. If they could just get a picture of a senator tossing a scrap of food at the staff member.

**RITCHIE:** Who was probably grateful to get it.

**WEISS:** Yes, no doubt! It quieted his hunger for a moment at least. Glenn even told me once that the one thing about those meetings he hated was all these senators sitting around eating their lunch and the staff people just sitting back there and getting scraps. He said it made him very uncomfortable. I have to say I suspect there were few

senators in that room who were uncomfortable. They take their prerogatives with equanimity.

**End of the Fourth Interview**

**Weiss and Senator John Glenn in the senator's office, December 15, 1976.**



**Weiss attends a meeting with Vice President Dan Quayle and Senator John Glenn in Quayle's White House office, October 16, 1991.**

**Weiss with Senator John Glenn, Annie Glenn, and Dan Goldin, 1998.**



## ENERGY ISSUES

### Interview #5

November 4, 2004

**DONALD RITCHIE:** You suggested that today we could talk about some of the issues we haven't talked about before.

**LEONARD WEISS:** Right, and I don't know why I sort of forgot about these, because they actually were very important at the time. But anyway, there was one issue in particular that had to do with the state of Ohio, at least in part. I got a call one day from somebody representing a union, who had some members working in a plant in Ohio, in the town of Fernald. It was a DOE facility. I had been working on energy policy generally, particularly nuclear, for the past few years. This must have been sometime around 1980. I had never heard of this plant. I'm working for an Ohio senator and I just had never heard of this plant. I asked some questions about what the problem was. He had called into Glenn's office to make a complaint, they had passed him on to me. He told me the problem was that they thought the plant was not being run correctly by the contractor. He felt that workers were not being treated well and there were health risks.

I decided to look into this. The first thing I did was to look up and find out about this plant. Much to my amazement, it turned out to be a plant that had about 1100 workers in it. In other words, it was a monstrous facility. Fernald was a cog in the nuclear weapons manufacturing complex. It was a plant that made uranium ingots, which were then passed on to another plant for additional processing, with the ultimate aim of making them into parts that went into the bomb. It was a very important element in the manufacturing process of nuclear weapons, and I knew nothing about it. So I decided to go out there. I made a visit to take a look at this plant. What I saw out there was absolutely appalling.

The plant was dirty. I was no expert on manufacturing facilities, but you didn't have to be, you just walked in there and you could see this plant was old, it was creaky, it was dirty. I didn't like the look of it at all. I talked to the managers, and the contractor sent down a high-level vice president. They admitted there were some problems. They said they were doing their best to try to deal with it, and so forth. I also met with worker representatives, who told me some interesting stories. They elaborated on the health risks. I was particularly interested in hearing about that. One of the things that they told me was there was a system of alarms that would go off regularly. As they were doing the work that they had to do, making these ingots, they were exposed to low-radioactivity emanating from the material—it was uranium after all. Handling uranium is not

necessarily all that hazardous, except if you breathe in uranium dust. Well, that was the problem.

There was a lot of uranium dust flying around. The site included an attached building, which had bag filters within it. During the manufacturing process, the filters would capture the uranium dust so it would not go out the chimney. There were furnaces that were being used to make these ingots. It turned out that the bags frequently tore, so there was a lot of uranium that was going up the stack. Now, where was it going? It was being deposited on the ground, picked up by the wind, deposited in surrounding communities. Now I really got interested in what was happening. When I got back to Washington, I ginned up a bunch of letters with Glenn's signature on them to get more information. I wanted to get health records for the workers. I wanted to get some information about what kind of exposures were being experienced by communities and by the workers themselves.

It took me months to get the records. The contractor said at first that they didn't have them or couldn't find them. I started getting some records in dribs and drabs. Then, one day, a whole batch of records finally came, because I was really making a pest of myself. I was annoying DOE management, so they finally got the contractor to send these records, a big batch of them. It took me quite a while to go through them, but when I went through them my eyes almost jumped out of my head. There was significant radiation exposure of workers, despite the existence of an alarm system that was supposed to go off whenever significant uranium went up the stacks. There were monitors, and when the monitors reached a certain level, an alarm would go off, which was supposed to mean that you shut the manufacturing process down to find out what was going on and fix the problem. What was happening was the alarms were going off so frequently that the workers couldn't stand it. So they would shut the alarm off until some time when it was convenient to fix the filters. I did a calculation based on the rather incomplete records I had received and discovered that tons of radioactive material had gone up the stacks over the years that the plant had operated.

Well, it became a rather big thing. We held a series of hearings on it. We got the contractor fired and someone else took over the plant. We did oversight on it with the new contractor. As it turned out, they couldn't do things much better than the old one anyway, but there was some improvement. Then finally, the United States started to get out of the nuclear weapons manufacturing business anyway, except for refurbishing the bombs that were already in the stockpile, so ultimately the plant closed.

In the meantime, I had Glenn go out to the plant. When I came back from my own visit I said, "You've got to go and see this plant, because your constituents are at risk and it's an important element in our national security business." He said okay, so he went out

to the plant and I went with him. There were other people from DOE and elsewhere. One other interesting thing. The contractor, of course, was saying all along that despite the exposures, there were no serious health problems. But during my investigations, one of the contractor managers from their headquarters told me a story about when he first visited the plant. He said he was doing a tour of the plant when all of a sudden an alarm went off and people started yelling that everybody had to put on respirators. They dispatched respirators and he put one on, and other people, too, and they finished the tour of the plant. At some point the alarms became quiet and they were able to take off their respirators. However, he said, within two days of when he got home he developed a flu-like respiratory problem which lasted for two weeks. He had no doubt that it came from having ingested some particles from the plant. So he told me this story, and at the same time I'm hearing from contractor spokesmen that there are no adverse health effects associated with the operations of this plant.

Armed with these facts, I brought Glenn to the plant and we were given a tour. At one point in the tour, they were showing how the uranium ingots were made. The ingot is cast and after it comes out of the mold, it falls onto a grate. And then a guy comes along with a jackhammer to knock off extraneous material sticking to the ingot. He's got a jackhammer and he's using it to knock off these particles while we're all standing in a semicircle around the grate, through which the particles are supposed to fall. But some are flying off into space. I thought, "These are particles of uranium, and we're all standing around breathing this stuff in!" I told Glenn, "I'm not standing around here for another two seconds." And I started walking away. We finished the visit and we made a lot of noise about it afterwards at a press conference. In fact, we did get something done. The DOE did take it seriously. We got the contractor fired. They brought in the new people and they did fix at least some of the problems. They did build a new bag house with new filters, and things did improve.

**RITCHIE:** Isn't there some problem for senators in the sense that whenever you want to regulate something, someone's going to say: it's going to cost jobs in your state. Here's a company that closed eventually, with 1100 jobs. Isn't there pressure on someone like Senator Glenn not to lean too heavily on a company like that?

**WEISS:** Yes, of course, that's always the case. But in this case, first of all, there was no prospect of the plant being closed prematurely because of the fact that this plant was a cog in the whole business of making nuclear weapons, and the United States wasn't going to stop making nuclear weapons because of an environmental problem. That wasn't the issue. The issue was: workers were at risk. Get it fixed. In essence, we did. Ultimately, as I said, the plant went down because there was no need for the service anymore.

That got us into the whole issue of worker safety at nuclear plants. I started expanding the work that the committee was doing—at that time we were a subcommittee—to look at worker protection more generally. The more I read about it, the more I came to the conclusion that the standards were very poor. We started collecting data about accidents that were happening at nuclear plants, and complaints at nuclear plants by workers. We worked with the Oil, Chemical & Atomic Workers Union to compile some data, because they were obviously interested. We came to the conclusion that the standards that had been set by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and also by EPA [Environmental Protection Agency] were just not really adequate. I had Glenn call for cutting the allowable exposures in half. Unfortunately, that didn't seem to do anything. The Congress did not, nor did the regulatory agencies, listen to us. But we got a lot of stuff in print and we made people more aware of the issue. That's all I can say we did.

DOE and the nuclear industry folks were just dead set against doing this, and they were also upset because the last thing in the world they wanted was to give the public the notion that there were exposures to radiation that the government was allowing that were unsafe, because that could affect the commercial nuclear industry. But we didn't care about that. We thought there was a genuine health problem that needed to be addressed here and we attacked it. It also brought home to me how professionals who have been trained to deal with health problems, when they get into an industry, sometimes use their professional credentials to do the exact opposite of what ostensibly they were trained for. Health physicists who were hired by the nuclear industry to presumably examine health effects of exposure to radiation invariably would say that the standards were fine, that there were no health problems, when the data indicated that there were problems. Their jobs were tied up with the health of the industry much more than the health of the workers. It was clear that many of them were really tools of management rather than professionals who were being objective and independent.

The work we did at Fernald gained us a reputation for investigating problems involving nuclear health and safety. As a result, we attracted complaints by whistleblowers about health and safety conditions at nuclear facilities in other states. We investigated radioactive contamination of the land at Richland, Washington, which is where government-owned reactors are located that produced the materials for the first atomic bombs. The reactors were no longer operating, but there was a tank farm containing huge amounts of nuclear waste, and some of the tanks were leaking high level waste that threatened to contaminate an aquifer and the Columbia River. We kept pressing DOE on the issue and they responded by accelerating the work they had started in shoring up the leaking tanks. There were also health and safety problems at the enrichment facilities in Portsmouth, Ohio, and Paducah, Kentucky. And we learned about plutonium contamination at the national lab sites in Livermore and Los Alamos. As a



result, I decided that there was a need for an independent regulatory body to oversee health and safety issues at DOE nuclear sites. In other words, an NRC for government facilities. I had Glenn raise this issue at hearings, but we had no legislative committee jurisdiction on this, and both the Energy Committee and Armed Services chairmen were opposed.

But we kept hammering away, and over a period of time the accumulation of safety risks for workers and nearby residents at these plants raised the consciousness of members of Congress. As a result, Glenn was able to get an amendment passed that I had worked out with staff from Energy and Armed Services to create the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board [DNFSB], modeled after the NRC, to review safety problems at the government's nuclear facilities. I couldn't get agreement on giving the board enforcement powers such as the shutdown of plants for violations, but I was able to get a requirement of full cooperation with the board, and data sharing, along with public disclosure by the board of recommendations that had not been implemented by a certain time. The threat of public disclosure turned out to be a powerful tool, and, to my knowledge, no DOE secretary has ever refused to implement recommendations made by the board.

There were a couple of other nuclear issues that we dealt with. One was the Nuclear Waste Policy Act. The Governmental Affairs Committee of course didn't have any direct jurisdiction over legislation like that. That was strictly Energy Committee stuff. However, what we did have jurisdiction over was the relationship of the federal government to state and local governments with respect to laws and regulations. When the bill was written, the idea behind the bill originally was that the federal government would basically determine where a nuclear waste repository would be and would take the spent fuel from reactors that were owned and operated by utilities and it would become ultimately the federal government's responsibility. That's the way it's working now, even though the spent fuel is still being kept at various sites. The government does have the responsibility to ultimately find a repository for it.

The people who wrote the bill wanted to get the industry out from under the nuclear waste problem, which was considered to be a serious problem by the general public, and one of the reasons why nuclear plants were very unpopular, because nobody wanted to have nuclear waste being stored in or near their community. The bill's proponents also recognized that no state and no local government would like to have nuclear waste dumped in their state or city or area. How to deal with that problem? Well, they would just make it a federal responsibility so the federal government would pick a site on federal land, and presumably roll over any state that objected. That's what they're now trying to do in Nevada. When the bill was put in, we put in a bid to the parliamentarian for jurisdiction over one part of the bill, which had to do with state and

local government, and we got that part of the bill. We wrote an amendment which basically said that the state and local governments combined could object to a federal proposal and could go to court to block it. The amendment passed. People said it didn't really matter because the federal government will ultimately prevail, but as you can see with what's happening in Nevada, it's not so easy. In essence, we made a contribution to the ability of states to prevent the federal government from rolling over them with respect to the siting of nuclear waste sites.

**RITCHIE:** I have a question about that legislative tactic. You got the parliamentarian to say you could consider that portion of the bill, but when you do that, what happens to it? Does the Energy Committee that is handling the rest of the bill then take your amendment, or do you bring this amendment up separately?

**WEISS:** No, we mark up that part of the bill. Whatever is in the mark-up then shows up as the Governmental Affairs markup of that bill when the bill essentially goes to the floor.

**RITCHIE:** So that has your language in the bill at that point?

**WEISS:** It has our language plus the original language. What we have to do is offer it as an amendment on the floor, and people either vote it up or vote it down.

**RITCHIE:** Does that guarantee the committee a seat in the conference committee?

**WEISS:** Not always. It depends. If the conference committee was going to act on that particular thing there might be a committee representative that would be brought into the markup just for that purpose. Frankly, I don't even remember exactly how that worked the last time. In fact, we might even have avoided it because I think in the end the Energy Committee took the amendment, so it was okay.

There was one other nuclear issue that I should have mentioned. There was a very famous case—this took place before I went to Capitol Hill—of a student from Princeton named John Aristotle Phillips. For a master's thesis, he designed a nuclear weapon using open literature. He made a bit of a splash by going to the newspapers and saying that he had done this. But when nuclear experts looked at it they said it wouldn't work. He was kind of an overnight sensation and then disappeared. Some years later, a guy walked into my office, a drop-out student from Harvard, and he said he's got a nuclear weapon design, which he got from open documents that he found in the Los Alamos library, as well as reading some other stuff. He actually had blueprints with him. He opened up these blueprints, and I looked at them but I couldn't say this was workable or not, but I took it seriously. His name was Dimitri Rotow. I talked to him for a while. He wanted to

go to the press. He had all these things about notoriety dancing in his head because I think he knew about the press attention that Phillips got. It turned out that publicity was something he was really seeking. There was a little bit of a con man about him, and I was very suspicious of him, frankly, but I took it seriously.

I talked him out of going to the press and said, “We will look at this carefully. Don’t do anything until we’ve had a chance to evaluate it.” Now, I had a friend named Ted Taylor, who I mentioned in an earlier interview. Taylor, by the way, had become an activist against nuclear weapons. A very interesting man. He spent most of his professional life designing these weapons but was now opposed to them. Taylor was someone who after you had spoken to him for a while you might think was a man connected to the clergy or to the secular humanist movement in some fashion. He was this really moral person who was very concerned about humanity in general, and concerned about war and armaments. Very soft spoken. You just couldn’t attach his persona to the work he had done all those years, where he came up with the most innovative nuclear weapons designs. He was the guy who showed how to make nuclear bombs very small and to do it in a way that would still allow you to have large yields. And it was clear that his former profession troubled him.

Anyway, I called Ted Taylor and said, “This guy has come into my office. He’s got what he says is a design. I wonder if you would take a look at it and tell me if you think it would work.” Taylor came to my office, I showed him the blueprints. He looked at it, and after examining it for a while, he said, in his opinion, this was a workable design. Okay, so I went to Glenn and told him the story. He said, “Well, what should we do?” I said, “I think we ought to hold some hearings about this because there’s a problem here in that Rotow was able to put this together, he says, completely from public sources.” Before we held the hearing I called DOE in and told them what I had. Rotow had given us the names of documents that he used, which he found at the Los Alamos library, and which in his view shouldn’t have been there. It turned out he was absolutely right. He found a bunch of documents which were clearly misclassified, but they were on the shelves in the unclassified portion of the library.

We ended up holding a hearing. Rotow was our star. He came in and talked about his design and what he used in order to create it. We had Ted Taylor testify to say that he thought it would work. DOE came in looking rather chagrined and said they would go back and examine the library and find out just how these documents got misclassified. They had Los Alamos scrub the library for mistakenly declassified documents and they found something like 106 documents that shouldn’t have been there, some of which contained data from nuclear tests that indicated what the design might have been of the bomb, if you put it in the hands of an expert. They ended up closing the library for a year in order to go through every document. Meanwhile Rotow had become a media star of

sorts, and so ABC News hired him to go back to the Los Alamos library after it reopened and see if he could find some documents which were still misclassified. And by God he did! (laughs) He found six more, including a report containing sensitive nuclear test data! So they closed the library again for a while.

In the end, what this showed—which was not a surprise to the experts but was a surprise to the general public—was that the information was clearly out there for how to design nuclear weapons. Even in the late '70s, people still had the idea that the United States was protecting all this nuclear information and it wasn't available to other countries. What Rotow showed was that any country with nuclear scientists could obtain the information that was needed in order to design a nuclear weapon. The information flow started, in fact, with a primer that had been written right after we built the bomb. It was available at Los Alamos, and had been declassified. In fact, as a result of our investigation, the Department of Energy reclassified a bunch of reports that had been declassified for some years.

This is of some import for something else that happened later. Not too long afterward, I think it might have been maybe a year later, a man named Howard Moreland wrote a paper on the workings of the hydrogen bomb, which he got from unclassified sources. He wanted to publish this paper in the *Progressive Magazine*. Somehow, and I don't remember exactly how, the government found out that the *Progressive Magazine* was going to publish this paper and they got a temporary injunction to stop the publication on the grounds that this was classified information and that it would be harmful to American national security. There was a story in the press, and we decided to hold a hearing on it. DOE was invited. Their general counsel argued that Moreland's information was in fact classified under a concept called "born classified," which had been used by the government since the beginning of the atomic age. Born classified meant that even a person who had no clearances, who by means of his own intellect or having surmised something from reading unclassified literature, were to sit and write down his surmise, and if the surmise turned out to be of significant help for the making of a nuclear weapon, that surmise was classified. I thought this was a ridiculous concept, but nonetheless the government was acting on it. They were trying to get Moreland's paper blocked on the grounds that it was born classified.

We did our homework. I was advised by a number of scholars to read an article that had been written for an encyclopedia by Edward Teller that explained how the hydrogen bomb worked. It was very hard to tell whether Moreland's pictures and drawings were that much different from what Teller had provided the encyclopedia. Another arrow in our quiver was the Rotow affair and the Los Alamos library debacle. In the end we made DOE look kind of silly by trying to block this when in fact there was already so much information out there for the general public. The fact that all these

mistakenly declassified documents had been placed for years out in the stacks, and they contained potentially more damaging information than anything in Moreland's article, in the end caused DOE to drop the injunction. The courts let the paper go forward. The *Progressive Magazine* published it. We played a small role in narrowing the concept of information that is classified.

I recently ran into Howard Moreland again at a talk here in town that was being given by someone from the National Security Council, Bob Joseph. Moreland is still sort of this weird idealist. I mean, we did not like the fact that Moreland was trying to publish this paper, frankly. Our view was that although it was likely that specialists, nuclear scientists who were interested in working on weapons, probably wouldn't find anything in Moreland's article that was something that they didn't know or couldn't find out, nonetheless we were uncomfortable with spreading bomb design information among the general public. It's another example of where the nature of nuclear weapons makes them inherently incompatible with a free and open society.

But Moreland thought spreading bomb design information was okay. He took the view, which has also been taken by some "defense intellectuals," like a political scientist named Kenneth Waltz, that the world might be better off if many countries had nuclear weapons, on the theory that deterrence really does work and you might end up with a more peaceful world. In other words, if everyone had nukes, everyone would be afraid to start a fight because of the dire consequences. Anyway, Moreland articulated this view at this recent meeting where I saw him again. So he hasn't changed his views. They are not my view of the world.

**RITCHIE:** While we're talking about nuclear issues, what was your general evaluation of the Department of Energy and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission? Was the executive branch performing the way you thought they should have in terms of nuclear power?

**WEISS:** No. The Department of Energy at the outset was pretty much captured by the nuclear industry. After all, both the department and the NRC grew out of the old AEC. What was the Atomic Energy Commission supposed to do? They were given a mandate by Congress to promote the development and use of nuclear energy. That mind-set just pervaded the entire agency. There was no way they were going to do anything but push for more development, more reactors, build them abroad, let other countries have information so they can do their own programs. DOE inherited that mind-set. And the NRC, which was supposed to regulate this activity, was pretty much a rubber stamp for selling things abroad. Gradually, over the years, the NRC changed a bit and became more responsible in this respect. They became better regulators. But it's been a spotty kind of change and very much dependent on which administration is in power. An administration

that is very friendly to nuclear energy always names people who are friendly to nuclear energy to the agency, and so the regulatory issues end up being what you would expect under those circumstances.

DOE has also been pretty steadfast in its support of nuclear energy, except during the Clinton years when Hazel O'Leary was the secretary of energy. She tried to bring more balance to the agency's focus, but she was not a good administrator and had difficulty controlling the bureaucracy.

Unfortunately, DOE just has not been an agency that presidents have paid sufficient attention to except for the few times that gas prices have made it politically expedient to do so. The way you tell an agency's standing is by looking at who gets appointed to be the secretary. The first secretary of energy was Jim Schlesinger, who certainly was a high-level person and a person who understood how to manage people, but even Schlesinger didn't really know a lot about energy. He's a lawyer, after all. He knew how to run the agency, but in terms of whether he could evaluate one technology over another, he was just listening to what his advisors were telling him, and trying to make some judgment about who might be telling the truth without being able to bring his own training to it because he's not a technology person. Nonetheless, his sheer intellect made him one of the better heads of DOE. It went downhill from there. At one point the secretary was a guy who had once been a dentist from North or South Carolina. They had Congress people or senatorial candidates who lost, like Spencer Abraham, who is now leaving. Let's put it this way—they don't show the agency a lot of respect in terms of the quality of the people appointed to be head of the agency. That tells you something about how good the agency really is.

**RITCHIE:** What was your impression of the kind of congressional oversight that the Energy Committees were giving to these agencies?

**WEISS:** Oh, the Energy Committee unfortunately—and they're not alone in this respect—congressional oversight generally is very, very poor. Congressional committees are frequently captured by the agency that they oversee, and except in unusual circumstances, like a public agency scandal, are very protective of the agency. This is particularly the case with the committees dealing with national security, like Armed Services and Intelligence. Part of the problem is the dependence on the agency for technical expertise. It's gotten better. When I first came on the Hill, for example, there were hardly any staff people who knew anything about technology or anything about science, so trying to do oversight over an agency whose basic mission had to do with science or technology was impossible.

In fact, that was the reason why OTA [Office of Technology Assessment] was originally established, so that the Congress would have its own expertise about dealing

with technology issues. It made it more difficult for Congress to be snowed by an agency or by an industry with influence on agency policy. Notice that as soon as a Congress was elected that was friendly to or beholden to industry, they got rid of OTA, because they didn't want independent judgments on technology policy that might challenge the desires of industry or an agency bureaucracy captured by industry. The industry could influence the agency through its lobbyists. It could also influence the Congress through its lobbyists. But lobbyists couldn't influence these independent agencies, like OTA, CBO, or the GAO. These independent agencies are powerful in that respect and they are a very important element in improving the way government works. The government works better when those agencies are around and are doing their jobs. Congress threw industry a bone when they got rid of OTA, which to my way of thinking was unfortunate. I think the government is worse off for it.

Generally speaking, I think the Governmental Affairs Committee did a very good job on oversight, certainly when the Democrats were running it. I'll make a partisan comment here. Generally speaking, Democrats believe in regulation and protection of the public from the powerful—or at least they used to more than they do now perhaps. When they were in power, those beliefs drove their interest in oversight. Republicans are not as friendly to regulation, and frequently when they are doing an oversight investigation of an agency, it's because an industry is complaining about the agency not giving the industry what it wants. We have gone through a cycle. When I first came, the expertise wasn't there for Congress to do good oversight over certain kinds of agencies. It began to change quickly. Congress realized they had to hire more people with technical expertise in order to help them do oversight, and those people got hired. Congress became more active and more sophisticated in examining policy decisions. Now industry is reigning supreme again and you have an administration and Congress which are not as interested in government regulation or in protection of the public, so oversight is going by the boards again, except for the kind of oversight where industry is complaining about an agency or a regulatory commission. I hope things will change again before long.

I just realized, there's one other element involving the nuclear business I should mention. This has to do with security at the weapons labs, which we got into as a full committee when we had our subcommittee and then again. We held at least two hearings on security problems at Los Alamos or Livermore. We tried to get DOE to fix the problem, but the issue kept coming back. Every few years something would happen and we would do a hearing, but new problems kept cropping up. The long-term congressman from Michigan, John Dingell, [also became deeply interested in the issue]. We did a hearing on security lapses at Los Alamos once, and Dingell, who chaired the House investigative committee and was more aggressive than most in seeking press attention, followed up on the issue and ran with it even more than we did. He ended up forcing the Department of Energy to put in all kinds of new fences, and lighting, and sensors around

the laboratories because we in our own hearing had exposed some gaps in the way security was being handled. They ended up spending a lot of money, and they were very resentful about that. I imagine the complaints have ceased since 9/11.

Our focus was not just on physical security, because I thought the problem of security also had to do with the way lab personnel interacted with people on the outside. There was a visitor program at the laboratories. Each laboratory had its own visitor program and there were some guidelines. The guidelines were very loose, and as a result some people got into those laboratories that shouldn't have. We wrote some letters, and we held a hearing. DOE told us that the laboratories put in a new procedure. The procedure required that before anybody could visit a laboratory from the outside, the FBI would have to do some sort of a background check and make sure that they were who they purported to be. Frequently, the FBI, not being a very efficient organization sometimes, would take more time to do these background checks than they should have. Scientists and administrators at the labs would get rather impatient sometimes, especially if they had a visitor coming from a distant country like the Soviet Union. By the time they got a visa, made the arrangement as to when they could be there and who was going to be there in order to host them, the time would come for the visit and the FBI report on the visitor wouldn't be available. So the lab sometimes let the visitor come anyway, because it was a problem to cancel the visit and then try to reschedule it later.

That went on for a little while until one day an FBI report came in after a visit and it turned out that the guy who was visiting was a KGB agent. Of course, all hell broke loose. We were looking at that issue and we got some data from the laboratories as to who had come to the labs over the last couple of years and where they were from. We found it somewhat appalling because we looked down the list and almost every country that was a proliferation problem had people coming to these laboratories and visiting for different periods of time. For a one-day visit maybe it wasn't so important, but some of these people were coming and staying for weeks to months. Also, laboratory people were traveling abroad. They were going to meetings. They were giving papers. There had been various meetings where classified information had been given mistakenly and that kind of stuff. So we thought there ought to be some better controls.

They put in new procedures, additional procedures, which they undoubtedly felt were a pain in the neck, and to some extent they probably were. There is always a certain amount of unintended overkill in these things because a blanket rule may not make sense in a particular situation. And when it comes to national security, the Congress always likes to appear tough. Anyway, we did periodic oversight of the new procedures, revisiting the issue every two or three years. We would ask the GAO to examine the visitor record at the labs to make sure that the procedures that had been put in were being



followed and everything was okay. They went in, and invariably they would find that they weren't being followed, or they were being gotten around in a particular way.

I remember one case that really stuck in my mind. There was an Israeli scientist who had a friend who worked at Los Alamos. This friend at Los Alamos invited this guy through the normal procedures to come and visit because they were working in an area in which both had an interest. The proposal for the visit indicated what they would work on. It would involve the Israeli scientist having access to a computer in the laboratory, but it would be an unclassified computer. They did a background check on this Israeli scientist and it turned out that he was deeply involved in the Israeli nuclear weapons program. So the lab turned down the proposed visit. He couldn't come to visit the laboratory, but he could visit his friend at Los Alamos. He was coming to the United States anyway, so he went to visit his friend and stayed at his friend's house for about two weeks or thereabouts. He didn't get into the laboratory, but his friend had a computer at home which was tied into the laboratory's computer. So they were doing work at his friend's home using the lab's computer anyway. We made some noise about that, that the visitor program was not being taken seriously by the rank and file as well as by management at the laboratories.

They said they would fix it and there would be further new procedures in place. Why am I telling you this story? Because it's instructive when you look at the Wen Ho Lee case. When the Wen Ho Lee case came out—this was the case of the Chinese-American scientist, I can't remember now whether he was born in China or Taiwan, but he was working at Los Alamos and at some point he was accused of being a spy for China. He had gone overseas on a trip. He had met some people he was not authorized to meet. He didn't file the right report when he came back. His wife was also involved in some fashion. Los Alamos was having a series of security problems, and they're still having them by the way. Every once in a while you read another report about computer disks or hard drives disappearing that had classified information on them, and nobody knows where they are. Los Alamos kept having these problems and now they found this guy.

The story was that an intelligence analyst had discovered on the basis of reading some documents that the Chinese seemed to have had access to some very classified information about American nuclear weapons. Only some people at Los Alamos who were working in a certain area would have had access to such information. They started looking at who might have had access to it, and they focused on Wen Ho Lee because he had these violations with respect to his travel. He ended up going to jail for almost a year. He was even in solitary confinement for a good part of that time, while his case was being appealed. He pleaded guilty to one count of some misdemeanor charge and that was that. He was discharged from his job and suffered a great deal. This happened after I

had left the Senate, but I was giving a talk somewhere and somebody asked me about Wen Ho Lee, and I said I didn't know whether Wen Ho Lee was a spy or not—the trial, I think, was going on at that point—I said, “But I have some experience with respect to security at the labs,” and I told all these stories regarding the hearings that we had held and the investigations that we did. I said, “The labs are a sieve. Information just keeps leaking through and they apparently can't seem to fix the problem.”

People transfer information from classified computers to unclassified computers for the purpose of working on them at home or for some other convenient purpose, and therefore to be able to trace a leak of information and find exactly where it came from is very difficult. The fact that Wen Ho Lee had some security violations doesn't necessarily mean he's a spy, but it doesn't clear him either. Later on, I became totally convinced that he was probably not a spy. But in any case whatever damage was done, was done, and there's nothing we could do about it.

**RITCHIE:** The control of information is going to get even harder because vast amounts of data can be stored on a disk and can be transferred instantly. Everyone uses laptops so it's very hard for agencies to see what's coming and going.

**WEISS:** That's right, and it became apparent to us very early on. The Rotow affair convinced me that information was no longer the issue with respect to nuclear weapons. The issue was the materials and the equipment. And now as time goes on, the equipment business is no longer the issue because, as A.Q. Khan has demonstrated, you can find people all over the world who can manufacture things that are useful for making nuclear weapons. In the end, it boils down to just trying to control the ability to make plutonium and highly enriched uranium, and they're having a lot of trouble doing that too. So that's basically the issue. Let's see, what else can I talk about?

I can tell one interesting story about relationships. I mentioned the hearings that were held in the Governmental Affairs Committee on fund-raising by the Democrats in the 1996 campaign, and that Joe Lieberman and John Glenn were at odds about their roles in those hearings. Glenn and Lieberman had a touchy relationship that started before those hearings. When I thought about it, I thought that maybe the relationship in the hearings was partly due to the touchy relationship, and probably mostly due to the fact that Lieberman understood that he could gain some political benefits from playing a role where he could look like he wasn't there just trying to protect the Democrats.

The split, if I can characterize it as that, occurred—or at least the first instance that I can recall—sort of early on, about a year after Lieberman got elected to the Senate and came to the committee. I sat in on the first meeting that he had with Glenn. It was a very nice meeting. Before the meeting, I found out that Lieberman had written a thin book, which was the outcome of some kind of a thesis that he wrote when he was in law

school. It happened to be on nuclear proliferation.<sup>6</sup> So I read it before the meeting with Glenn, and actually I was rather impressed with it. During the meeting I even brought it up and I told Glenn that Lieberman has written this really nice book, and he would be a valuable member of the committee.

Lieberman, very ambitious and also aggressive in his ambition, wanted to—he was hoping, he said, that Glenn would be able to give him a subcommittee. At that point, there weren't very many freshman senators who got subcommittees. Now it's almost *de rigeur*, but not at that time. Also, we had taken over the committee as majority and we were in fact bringing money into the full committee from some of the other subcommittees, especially from the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, because we had a lot of ideas about what we wanted to do. We were not anxious to have another subcommittee. But Glenn said to Lieberman, at my suggestion, that Lieberman could chair hearings at the full committee level and obviously get whatever publicity came out of those. Our staff would support his hearings. That was fine with him. He ended up being an active person on the committee. Our staff helped him organize a whole bunch of hearings on subjects that he was very interested in, and he did well.

The next year when the Congress organized, he came again to Glenn and really started aggressively pushing Glenn to give him a subcommittee. He talked to me directly. He talked to Glenn directly. Of course, when he talked to me, what am I going to tell him? I referred him to Glenn, right? So he went and talked to Glenn. Glenn somehow got out of the corner Lieberman was trying to paint him in, but he called me in and said, "Lieberman wants a subcommittee. Should we give it to him?" I said, "Well, you can give it to him," but I came prepared, I knew the budget figures, and I said, "Here's what the budgets look like. You've got this amount of money for the full committee. You've got this money which we're obligated to give to the other subcommittees. If you give him a subcommittee you've got to take money out of either those subcommittees and the full committee, or the full committee alone." I said, "I cannot imagine that all those other senators who are chairing the subcommittees are going to allow you to take part of their money in order to give Lieberman a subcommittee. So you'd have to do it all by yourself." "Oh," he said, "well, what should I do?" I said, "I don't know. This is what you have. It's up to you as to what you want to do."

Glenn always found it hard to say no to somebody. I may have mentioned this earlier. If you pushed him hard on something, he found it very hard to say no. And Lieberman was a pusher. Glenn finally decided, the next time that Lieberman cornered him in the cloakroom or wherever, he told Lieberman that if it was okay with Bill Roth, who was the ranking minority, that it would be okay with him, on the thought that Roth,

<sup>6</sup>Joseph I. Lieberman, *The Scorpion and the Tarantula: The Struggle to Control Atomic Weapons, 1945-1949* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970).

you see, would have to give up some money from the minority side of whatever subcommittee Lieberman had, and Roth probably wouldn't want to do that because he was now minority and had even less money. But it turned out that Lieberman was very persuasive with Roth. He went to Roth and Roth said okay. So he went back to Glenn and said, "Roth said okay, now what?" Glenn said, "I can't talk to you now, we'll talk about this later." He called me, and I went to his office. He said, "Lieberman has talked to Roth, and Roth said it was okay. What should I do?" I said, "I think you're going to have to do it, because you told him that if Roth said it was okay you would do it." But I pointed out again, "Here's what the budget figures are. I'm going to have to let somebody go in order to accommodate Lieberman."

I probably could have finessed it a little better. Maybe Glenn could have gone to Lieberman and said, "Okay, we're going to have to transfer a staff member to you, and you're going to have to take this person on because we hired him." But we didn't do it that way. Glenn went back to Lieberman and he decided he didn't want to lose any staff, so he said no, he can't really do this. Lieberman was furious. But he didn't show his fury to Glenn. He assumed that I had talked Glenn into changing his mind. I don't know where I was one day, I think I was on the Senate floor, and one of Lieberman's people came to me, it was either his legislative director or his AA, and he said Lieberman wanted to have a meeting with me, just me. "And he's very unhappy." Okay, I'll be right up. I went to Lieberman's office. I walked in and there's Lieberman and he's got his AA and he's got his leg. director. He began to tell me that Glenn had gone back on his word on his getting a subcommittee and he wants an explanation from me. I said, "Senator, this is not a decision that I made. This is not even a decision that I recommended. This was Senator Glenn's decision and you'll have to deal with him on it. It's not at my pay level." He said, "All right." He let me know how he felt, that he had been put in this very bad position and made to look ridiculous, having gone to Roth and gotten Roth's permission to do this, and now nothing happened.

Lieberman was cool to me personally ever since. He didn't believe that I wasn't the one to make Glenn change his mind. I obviously had a role by showing Glenn the budget figures, but I never made the recommendation. In fact, I told Glenn he was obligated to do it. But Glenn was also ambitious, and we had a very big agenda that we had planned, and he wanted to do it. I think that that may have been the motivation for their not having gotten along ever since. I mean, they were always very civil to one another, but Glenn would complain privately that Lieberman just didn't like him. He once said that if he got up and said that he thought the sky was blue, Lieberman would get up and say, no, the sky is black, that sort of thing. So personal relationships in the Senate can sometimes make a difference in what happens in terms of public discussion.

**RITCHIE:** Did you have to deal much with the Legislative Appropriations Subcommittee in terms of the budget for the committee?

**WEISS:** Well, I had to prepare a budget. I didn't have to lobby for it. I would make up the budget working with my office manager, a woman named Mickey Prosser who would help us put the budget together. I would assign what each subcommittee ought to get. We would write down what the plans were for the committee for the following year. Making up a budget was easy for me, because having come from a university where I had my own research contract, I had to do pretty much the same sort of thing for agencies that were supporting my research. All I did was transfer that skill to the Senate, only it was a lot easier in the Senate. (laughs) It was astoundingly easy. At the university I was supported by the Air Force Office of Scientific Research in one contract and it was like pulling teeth. I really would sweat over these things because there were guys who would really look at the proposals very carefully. They would come back to me and they would ask questions. In the Senate I would make up an agenda and say this is the amount of money we needed. I never asked for less than the year before, I always asked for more.

Originally, I did it in the hope that I would get at least as much, and then it turned out no matter what I asked for I got! It was only when the budget crunch came generally for the country and the Congress had to cut back on the agencies, and especially when we were minority, and the Republicans wanted to make a show of fiscal responsibility, they forced all the committees to cut back. I think the cut back only occurred one year, maybe two. Generally, the worst that would happen was that you stayed where you were, you didn't get reduced. But the first few years, whatever you asked for, you got. It was just amazing to me. I didn't have to deal with Appropriations. We had to make a presentation, like all the other committees, but the presentations were made before the Rules Committee. Glenn would come with his Republican counterpart and there was always agreement. Everybody wanted more money. Nobody wanted to get cut. I would write out a statement for him, which he would give, and I think generally our statements were a bit better, if I may say so, than some of the other committees, because again I had been used to pushing for getting money when I was an academic, so I was doing the same thing here, making perhaps a stronger case for it than probably needed to be done in order to ensure that we would get what we wanted.

**RITCHIE:** One reason I asked was, in the normal process of things, if Senator Glenn had wanted to accommodate Senator Lieberman, would he have waited until the next Congress and asked for more money to create a new subcommittee?

**WEISS:** Oh, yes, that's what happened. That's exactly what happened. Lieberman asked for the subcommittee the second year of his Senate term, so it was a

mid-year. Then when the new Congress came in the following year, we gave him a subcommittee. We asked for more money, we got the money, we gave him a subcommittee. But I don't think he ever forgot that he was put in that position. It really rankled him. He gives the public impression of being this sort of avuncular, easy-going person, but no, there's a lot of steel behind him, and his ambition knows no bounds.

The funny thing is that after he got the subcommittee, he did practically nothing. He worked hard on the committee when we gave him the opportunity to hold hearings on the full committee. He did good work. He was active. Every time he wanted to hold a hearing we gave it to him and we provided staff. When he got his own subcommittee, he did nothing. A couple of perfunctory hearings a year, or something like that. A very, very poor record. His focus had shifted. It was somewhat ironic after having gone through all of that that his contribution to the committee was so small. I think his contribution has gone up since then, now that he's ranking on the committee. Did he ever serve as chairman in the last few years?

**RITCHIE:** I'm not sure. He may have been chairman in 2001, when the party majorities switched.

**WEISS:** Anyway, he's ranking now.

**RITCHIE:** Carl Levin might have been chairman.

**WEISS:** Carl Levin was never chairman of the committee. That was another thing with Levin and Lieberman. The two plum jobs on the committee from a senator's point of view are the chairman of the committee and if not chairman of the committee then chairman of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, which is the largest subcommittee and has the biggest budget.

**RITCHIE:** That's right, Senator Levin was chairman of PSI.

**WEISS:** Right. When Glenn became chairman of the committee, for example, he didn't have the most seniority. Sam Nunn had more seniority than he did, and who else? There was one other person on the Democratic side, I think it was Lawton Chiles. On the Republican side, Ted Stevens had the most seniority. On the Democratic side, Sam Nunn didn't want to be chairman of Governmental Affairs, because he couldn't be chairman of Governmental Affairs and chairman of Armed Services, and he preferred Armed Services. That was why Glenn was able to be chairman of Governmental Affairs. Nunn had to take a pass on it in order for Glenn to get the chairmanship, and then when things switched and the Republicans took over, Ted Stevens had to pass on it in order for Bill Roth to become the chairman. So those things were happening. But as a consolation prize, Sam Nunn was able to chair PSI.

Then there was sort of a thing between Levin and Lieberman because Lieberman thought that he would be able to take PSI after Nunn left the Senate, and Levin decided to take PSI. He had seniority over Lieberman so he got it. Lieberman didn't like that particularly. But those musical chairs were being played.

The only other thing that I might mention about the way the committee was run, Governmental Affairs always had difficulty getting a quorum at a markup. It's not a glamorous committee. It didn't attract lobbyists with bags of money because of the nature of the jurisdiction. It wasn't a committee that people really wanted to be on, and the way things usually worked was when it came time to organize the Senate they would have to assign people to Governmental Affairs if they didn't have enough requests for membership, or they would have too many for other committees. Invariably, we would end up with a couple of freshmen on the committee every Congress. Not only that, at times of markup, senators usually wanted to be someplace else anyway, whether they were running their own hearing or whether there was another markup going on in another committee that they cared more about rather than to come to Governmental Affairs. We always were having difficulty getting a quorum.

So I devised a procedure to get around that problem which was probably a violation of the rules, however we never got called on it. Sometime during a markup there would be a quorum, which would last maybe two minutes and then somebody would get up and walk out. Their name would be recorded as having been at the markup and then they would go wherever they really wanted to be. When that would happen, I would have Glenn propose that whatever bill was being marked up, that it be voted on to be sent to the floor subject to further amendment at the markup, so that in the end if they decided they didn't like any amendment which had been added or had been subtracted, they could change their vote. But in the meantime they would be recorded as having voted to pass the bill in committee. Much to my amazement—I mean, this was a shot in the dark, there was nothing in the Senate rules that provided for this—but they all accepted it. That was how the committee did its mark-ups, so we never had a problem with quorums anymore after that.

**RITCHIE:** In the Senate chamber, a quorum is always considered present unless somebody notices that there isn't a quorum.

**WEISS:** Exactly. But we couldn't do that in the committee. The rules were really quite clear that we needed to have a majority of the members there in order to have a quorum. But it worked.

**RITCHIE:** Establishing a quorum has always been a problem for committees where there are a lot of presidential contenders, who are never there.

**WEISS:** That's right. Governmental Affairs was not a vehicle that could be used very well for people who are interested in being president of the United States. No one showed this more clearly than Al Gore, who was on our committee for two years after he got elected to the Senate, and was already showing ambition to run for president. I guess he ran in '88.

**RITCHIE:** That's right, he was elected to the Senate in '84 and he first ran for president in '88.

**WEISS:** So from '84 to '86 he was on our committee. He was not a good committee member. He rarely showed up for a hearing, first of all, or a markup. When he did show up, it would be because there was a camera in the room. If the hearing was a little bit sexy, he would show up, just for sufficient time to go in, make some statement or other that he thought would be captured by the camera, and then immediately leave. At that time, the ranking minority member on the committee was the senator from Missouri, who had run for vice president with [George] McGovern.

**RITCHIE:** Oh, Eagleton.

**WEISS:** Tom Eagleton was the ranking minority on the committee. Eagleton's staff director complained to me bitterly once about Gore. Apparently, he just was impossible in terms of supporting the Democrats on some things that Eagleton wanted to do. I wasn't aware of this because a lot of things are done on a one-to-one basis before you have a general staff meeting in which you discuss a markup, which we did before every markup. If there were some amendments that were going to be offered, especially if they might be a little controversial, or you wanted to try to block something that the other side might do, you would try to gain support by calling up or having meetings with your counterpart for each senator on the Democratic side in my case. Then you would have a group meeting to ratify what had been decided in these one-on-one meetings. Well, apparently, Eagleton's person just couldn't get Gore's people to agree to anything. He wanted to keep his options open all the time. He didn't want to be seen as a partisan Democrat at that point. So this woman who was working for Eagleton was being driven nuts by this.

Finally, when Glenn took over the committee, I went to her to get some advice. I hadn't been the staff director of a full committee, only of a subcommittee, so there were some things I needed to know about. She was telling me about who would be helpful and who wouldn't. There was a woman who worked for Levin, Linda Gustitus, who was a very, very smart person. She was a terrific staff member and worked for Levin for many years. I think she just left fairly recently. When Levin first came on the committee I was working with her on a couple of things and was very impressed with her. It also became apparent that this was a no-nonsense person who had her own ideas about how things



ought to go and what ought to be done. I certainly respected that. But she could be a bear to work with if you didn't agree with what she wanted to do, or if she didn't agree with what you wanted to do. Apparently, she was also giving Eagleton's people fits with respect to trying to gain some sort of united front for the Democrats. But there was a lot of interesting byplay behind the scenes among the staff. It didn't always show up when you saw the result in the markup, or on the floor, but it's an element of work that the public hardly ever sees. The press, I think, is obviously much more aware of it.

Relations between the press and staff are interesting too. The business of leaks, the business of letting people know what's really going on, without identifying yourself, because you thought it was important for the public to know something. Sometimes the press cannot understand the difference between spin and telling the truth. I think I told the story about Elizabeth Drew?

**RITCHIE:** Oh, yes, sitting in Senator Thompson's office.

**WEISS:** It wasn't so much that. She was so cynical at that point after her long years of following things in Washington and on Capitol Hill that she sometimes didn't recognize when the truth was being told or that you really believed something was happening as opposed to you were simply saying it for effect. I suspect a lot of reporters probably are like that in Washington.

**RITCHIE:** Did you have reporters who came by regularly to the committee?

**WEISS:** Oh, yes, there were reporters who had Governmental Affairs as a beat and would come by to see you. Steve Barr, who now writes the Federal Diary column in the *Washington Post* was given that task the last few years that I was staff director of the committee. He would come by regularly to talk to me. There were also reporters who followed the nuclear issues who would call me all the time about something that was going on. There was one reporter who got me into a little bit of trouble at one point because I told him something that was supposed to be on background—well, not only supposed to be on background, it was just for his information, he wasn't supposed to print it *at all*.

**RITCHIE:** Off the record.

**WEISS:** Right, and he printed it. Fortunately, there were other people inside the government who had given the same information to others, so they couldn't pin it only on me! (laughs)

**RITCHIE:** In general, did you have a good press?

**WEISS:** Oh, yes, I had a very good relationship with the press corps. I think people generally were very sympathetic to what we were trying to do. So I liked the press. I know the press is reviled by a lot of people, but not by me. I may be mad at them for the way they treat certain stories that I have nothing to do with, but every story that I did have something to do with, by and large I thought was presented just the way I would have wanted it. I'm not patting myself on the back by saying that. I think the press understood what the issues were. I was just giving them the information. I wasn't spinning the story, I was just telling them what the truth was, and they printed the truth. I couldn't complain about that.

**RITCHIE:** I think every good reporter is in search of expertise, and when they develop some confidence in the information you are giving them then that solidifies you as a source.

**WEISS:** Right, and after a while you also learn to discern which reporters are really good and which reporters are not very good. Did I talk about Judy Miller?

**RITCHIE:** I'm not sure.

**WEISS:** No? You know Judy Miller is the reporter from the *New York Times*.

**RITCHIE:** Oh, yes, who's gotten into some controversies.

**WEISS:** Yes, she's in trouble now and they're trying to force her to tell some sources and threatening her with jail. Judy Miller is an example of how exalted the press sometimes thinks it is. She was a relatively young reporter when I first ran into her. She had been hired by the *New York Times* to follow nuclear issues among other things. So she came and talked to me and I got her in to talk to Glenn. Glenn thought she was a bit flighty, because she had this very high-pitched voice, and she's very high-strung, and prone to giggling at the time, not anymore, I think, but at that time she was a young reporter. She was writing stories about the work that we were doing and the write-ups were good, from my perspective. But as she rose in prominence at the *Times*, things changed a bit. She no longer would talk to staff. She now had access to senators because she had become prominent. If you called her, she wouldn't call you back. At about that time also she was linked romantically to Chris Dodd, among others, so she had all these sources at higher levels, and she also had sources inside the CIA, so she felt she didn't need to talk to congressional staff anymore.

I was really amused when this book came out that she and William Broad and one other person from the *Times* had written about biological warfare.<sup>7</sup> I've met William Broad and I think he knows something about the subject. Judy Miller is a journalist. She knows what people tell her, and she has no way of discerning what the truth is. If you have been trained as a scientist in one field, you can sometimes discern whether somebody is feeding you bullshit when they're talking about some other field. Unless you are totally ignorant about that field, you can tell sometimes by the way people speak as to whether in fact they know what they are talking about. Because she was a good reporter and had written extensively about it, the TV media decided that Judy Miller was an expert in biological warfare. It was both amusing and appalling to me when I would see her on the tube expounding on biological warfare. It made me stop and think about what the public thinks is expertise, and how the public is able to discern what the truth is on an issue from what is just spin.

There are some reporters, I think, who are probably willing to qualify what they say on the basis of "here's what I understand, what I've been told." She speaks in *ex cathedra* tones on these subjects as if she's really telling you what the scoop really is. In a way, therefore, her fall from grace because of her alliance with Ahmed Chalabi, with respect to Iraq, is salutary, so that people understand that a reporter only is as good as the sources on which they depend. They are not really making independent judgments themselves based on their own knowledge, but have to ultimately depend upon the knowledge of others, and therefore it's the integrity and knowledge of others that determines whether the reporter is telling you the truth or not. They shouldn't pretend that they are in some sense an independent expert on their own. Nonetheless, I hope she doesn't go to jail because I think reporters should be able to protect their sources.

**RITCHIE:** That's really essential, otherwise people wouldn't give them information in confidence.

**WEISS:** And that's another thing, I'm very and always have been sympathetic to whistleblowers, recognizing that whistleblowers have mixed motives for becoming such. Some become whistleblowers because they've got a personal grievance of some kind that has nothing to do with the issue, but there are some whistleblowers who are genuinely concerned about the public good and become whistleblowers because of that. They all suffer regardless, because of becoming whistleblowers, and that's too bad because I think they are a very important element in the oversight of government.

<sup>7</sup>Judith Miller, Stephen Engelberg, and William Broad, *Germes: Biological weapons and America's Secret War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001).

A lot of congressional hearings occur because of whistleblowers, because they provide information that an agency does not want the Congress to know about, and which the Congress would not know about except for the fact that someone within the agency was willing to put their career at risk. We don't have enough of it. The protections for whistleblowers don't work very well. They really need to understand what the risks are.

When a whistleblower would come to us, which they did occasionally, I always would make sure that they understood that there could be some pretty dire consequences, that we were only in a limited position to protect them, and that they should understand that we would do what we could, but we couldn't guarantee that they would be protected. Then if they were still willing to go ahead then that was fine. I think I'm done.

**RITCHIE:** Well, I'm glad we did this session because it certainly added some dimensions into the interview as a whole, and I appreciate that. One thing I wanted to caution you as you go through the transcript is that all of us on Capitol Hill are trained in cleaning up language for senators and turning things into formal prose, but oral history is spoken history and it has a different rhythm to it. Don't feel too concerned about making it too formal. We may make mistakes in transcribing, getting a name wrong that should be corrected, and you may see an idea that wasn't clear that needs further explanation, but don't feel compelled to turn it into formal prose.

**WEISS:** Oh, no, first of all it's too much work to do (laughs) at this point in my life. I'm not interested in doing that. I also don't have any notion that there will be very many people who will read this.

Also I was trying to explain to my wife after the last session why I got so emotional in talking about that trip that we took to Nepal. I still can't fully explain it. You know, it happens every time. It's a combination of things. One would have to get into my psyche rather deeply to understand it. I came out of a background of poverty, and I saw poverty in those places that was way beyond my own case. And I saw no element of recognition—I think that was part of it—these senators and their wives came and there was no element of recognition on their part, although they saw what I saw. Peggy Udall, I think, was trying to explain it. She was trying to say, "Look, there's a disaster here. It's not only here, it's in a large part of the world. These young kids are giving up their health. They're risking their lives to try to do something for these poor people." And all these guys could think of is: could we pay you some more money? It just got to me, and it gets to me, I guess, every time I talk about it.

**RITCHIE:** It's the underlying reason for sending senators out to see the world, and you hope that for at least some of them there will be a connection.

**WEISS:** Right, and the idea was she was thanking them for having come, because no other senators had come to see what they saw.

I've always felt some distance from a lot of people because of my own background. Poverty affects people in different ways. Colin Powell grew up in New York and he went to City College, and he obviously didn't come from a rich family, but his family was better off than mine. We were a welfare family for a while, and we weren't even a family for a while. In order for my mother to get welfare, my father had to leave, and he was gone for four years. So all of that is tied up with this stuff. I see what happens in the third world. There is a bit of a personal connection, even though, as I say, there's no comparison. We were still, with all those troubles, so much better off than people in Darfur, for example. I was hoping that there would be some recognition, and Peggy Udall was trying desperately to get them to make some connection, some human connection, but she recognized that the fact that they came was better than not having come at all and she was so grateful for their presence. So that's what it is. It's not much of an explanation.

**RITCHIE:** No, it's very telling. I'm sure that there are a lot of committees that go but don't actually see and don't connect to the places they visit, or don't list it high on their priorities of things to deal with.

**WEISS:** No, they come to visit with high-level governmental officials. They do some sightseeing. There isn't much interaction with what's really happening on the ground in these places. That was certainly true of us as well, but you really had to be blind not to see how bad it was.

**RITCHIE:** Well, thank you very much.

**WEISS:** Thank you. I've enjoyed it too. It's been interesting. It saves me the trouble of writing my life story.

**RITCHIE:** Well, that's the reason why we do oral histories. If you do decide to write a book, you've got the core of it right here.

**WEISS:** I don't feel my story is particularly unique. I am publishing some papers, but the papers all have to do with policy issues. I've just contracted with the *Arms Control Today* Magazine to write an article on the A.Q. Khan network and on nonproliferation policy on their March issue, which I have to get done by mid-January.

**RITCHIE:** Do you have a vitae with all of your publications listed in it?

**WEISS:** No, I do not. I have a vitae but not one with all the publications listed.

**RITCHIE:** A bibliography would be interesting to include as an appendix.

**WEISS:** Well, all right, I probably should do that. I'm not even sure I have that information. I am very bad at keeping records (laughs). My wife claims that I am one of the least organized people that she knows, and she's always getting after me on it. I don't deny it. When I was doing my work in the Senate, most of the materials were in my head. I did not have a fancy filing system for my own stuff. I just have—I had, I don't know if it's still very good—but I had a very good memory. I used to be able to retain large amounts of information, and so I really didn't need to have a very good filing system in order to know what was going on and to remember from one meeting to the next what happened. I just was able somehow to retain it. My filing system was in my head. Now, of course, things are a little different and I have to be more organized. But your suggestion is a good one and I will pay attention to it and try to put something together. I've got to write this paper for the *Arms Control Today* Magazine first, and I keep getting interrupted by various things. I just finished chairing a panel that worked for a year for the Federation of American Scientists on weaponization of space. We just finished a report, and I'm supposed to write something up from the report for that as well, for publication, so I've got a couple of projects that will interfere with my doing this, but I will get to this.

**RITCHIE:** Very good. If you are looking for any information, we can use the Senate Library to pull some of that out.

**WEISS:** Well, it would have been helpful. If I had been better organized I think maybe the interviews would have been better because I wouldn't have had to depend on memory as much. For example, the things that we talked about today, something happened a day or so after you left the last time that I suddenly remembered: my goodness, there were these other things that were very important to me at one point that I totally forgot about.

**RITCHIE:** That's a very common phenomenon in oral history. As you're doing the interviews, it triggers memories that have been seemingly lost for years. People are often astonished at how much they remember. Things get embedded in memory that come out even though they have not been rehearsed in any way, or prepped. It makes oral history a very interesting device, as a result, but I also learn so much from them. As a historian, who has to explain to others what the Senate is doing, it's a real boost to me to sit down with you to find out how things worked and what the background operations were.

**WEISS** [deleted] [One of the pleasures of being staff director on Governmental Affairs was that you got to interact with and know other members of the committee besides your boss. And that meant sometimes hearing wonderful stories told, one on one,

informally in the anteroom of the committee room. Here's an example. Senator Ed Zorinsky of Nebraska was a member of the committee for a while]. I have one Zorinsky story. Zorinsky was unusual in being Jewish and coming from a state with a very small Jewish population. This has nothing to do with his being Jewish, but he was telling me a story—for some reason, there was something about me that senators who didn't know me very well would sometimes tell me funny stories. We were talking about the embargo in Cuba for some reason, maybe there was going to be some action on the floor regarding the embargo. I wasn't talking to him on the floor. He was on our committee and we happened to be alone in the anteroom of the hearing room of the committee. [All the other members were probably on the floor for a vote.] So he started to tell me this story. "You know," he said, "I had this conversation once with Castro." I said, "Oh, you did?" I was really interested.

For some reason he had actually called Castro. It's hard to believe now when I think about what's happened with the U.S. Cuban relationship, but he had some reason to call Castro. Oh, I know what it was. He was lobbying to get somebody out of jail in Cuba. So he called Castro to lobby Castro. He made the call assuming that he probably wouldn't get to talk to him, but by God when he put in the call and he said who he was, Castro got on the phone. He made his pitch and he said Castro listened. Then Castro said, "Well, Senator Zorinsky, ordinarily I would pay no attention to a U.S. senator who calls and asks me for something, but in your case it's different, because I know what you did in respect to Radio Marti." And he got the guy sprung.

All right, what was this business with Radio Marti? Radio Marti was a program which the United States had set up in order to have radio broadcasts go into Cuba against the regime, sort of like what Radio Free Europe was doing at one time. Zorinsky thought that the people who were running it were ideologues. They were the Cubans who participated in the Bay of Pigs with the CIA, and the ones who were absolutely crazy in terms of dealings with Castro, so he argued in a speech that this is not the way this thing should be set up. It should not be a false propaganda organ. It should be an organ for telling the truth about various things. I assume he lost. I don't know, but I'm assuming he lost, but anyway Castro knew what was going on, and he knew about the speech he had made, and he appreciated it, so he did him the favor that he asked for, and he sprung the guy out of jail.

**RITCHIE:** It's always been an irony that the same politicians who complain that the media is biased want the United States to sponsor media that sends out propaganda.

**WEISS:** There are so many ironies in terms of U.S. policy and congressional activities and behavior. Human beings are not consistent in terms of what they do and what they say. It makes the world more interesting, but also more dangerous!

**End of the Fifth Interview**



## A SCIENTIST IN GOVERNMENT

### Interview #6

December 21, 2005

**LEONARD WEISS:** I wanted to complete the record on what we talked about previously with respect to the inspectors general. I'm not sure which ones we talked about. I remember talking about the NRC, but I know we did more than that. It turned out, as I reminded myself by looking at this document [*Activities of the Committee on Governmental Affairs*, Report of the Committee on Governmental Affairs, United States Senate, and its Subcommittees for the One Hundredth Congress (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1989), Report 101-180] that we also did the Justice Department, and the Treasury Department, and FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] and OPM [Office of Personnel Management], as well as the NRC and all those thirty-some-odd small agencies. Now, because FEMA has been in the news lately because of Hurricane Katrina, I was thinking about what was it about FEMA that made us want to focus on them in addition to these other departments. The short answer is that we wanted to include as many major departments as possible that did not have inspectors general, because we were convinced that the Inspector General Act had in fact been a good thing. The inspectors general were coming up with ways in which government was wasting money or where programs weren't working, so that corrections could be made.

FEMA was in fact kind of a mess by the time we took over the committee. It had a very low reputation in Washington. I'm not sure if many people remember this, at this point, but the morale of the workers at FEMA was abysmally low. We used to get complaints all the time from people who were working there, telling us about people who were quitting because FEMA wasn't getting the job done; telling us about the depredations of management, and all kinds of stuff. So when Clinton came in and named James Lee Witt as his FEMA director, we took particular care in interviewing Witt when he came over. We interviewed him at the staff level first before his confirmation hearing. I have to say that I was not terribly impressed with him at the beginning. When he came in, he had this very strong Arkansas accent, this kind of down-home disposition. He talked with a great deal of confidence, although his talk was low-key. I really didn't know quite what to make of him.

He had a good reputation, coming from Arkansas, but my thought was, "Gee, can this guy who headed an emergency management department in Arkansas really do the job on the national level?"

But he did say one thing which I took to be a very good sign. He said that he knew employee morale was low so that the first thing he was going to do when he got in

was to go and meet every single worker at FEMA as they came in to work the first day that he was on the job. And he did it. He got there early and stood outside the door of the building and as everybody came in he shook everybody's hand and introduced himself personally. So he got off to a terrific start. The workers were impressed by it, and frankly we were impressed by it, too. He told us he was going to do it, and he did it just the way he described. He ended up doing a bang-up job.

Nonetheless, we didn't want the agency to be so dependent on how good the guy at the top was. We wanted to have an independent voice reviewing FEMA programs. That was why we decided to have an IG at FEMA as well as the other agencies. To some extent, the same arguments were used in justifying IGs at Treasury, and Justice, and so forth. We really needed to have at least a quasi-independent voice examining the agency, pointing out errors or pointing out places where management needed to pay attention. I think overall it worked reasonably well.

**DONALD RITCHIE:** It seems to me that it was during the last Bush administration that Hurricane Andrew hit Florida [August 24, 1992], which was another case when FEMA was criticized for coming in too late and producing too little. It seems like you need to have a major disaster to prove how inadequate FEMA really is.

**WEISS:** Right. Now, I have to say that I don't remember what role if any the IG played with respect to fixing management problems at the agency after Hurricane Andrew or any of the other big storms where FEMA was called in. So I can't say. Quite frankly, I haven't paid a lot of attention to it since I left the Senate. To some extent, obviously, how good the IGs perform is a function of who's in that office and the kind of resources that are given to that person to do the job. I gather it isn't working too well right now. We'll have to see. But that's also a function of congressional oversight, and the oversight has been abysmal. That's not just true of FEMA, I think congressional oversight has been abysmal across the board. It's much worse now, it seems to me, than it was when I was in the Senate. I always felt oversight needed to be better, but it just seems to be completely broken down now.

**RITCHIE:** Do you think oversight works better when the majority party in at least one house of Congress is the opposition party to the president?

**WEISS:** Oh, no question about it. There is, of course, a certain amount of political posturing that occurs. If the party that is in charge of the Congress is different from the party of the president, you're going to have a lot more critical oversight. This is both good and bad. I would say on balance it's good, because there will be a tendency to look more critically at how the government is operating and how the executive branch is operating. The downside, of course, is that there are going to be things that are done under the guise of oversight that are purely political in nature. When that happens you

end up with circuses, like the Clinton impeachment. But overall I would say yes, the scrutiny is a lot better when you have divided government.

I have to say that with a Democratic president in there—I'll take Jimmy Carter as my example, but it was true of Clinton as well—Democrats were much more anxious to do oversight on the executive branch when Carter was president than Republicans have been anxious to do oversight in *any* Congress during which a Republican president was in power. That was true of Reagan, George Bush the First, and the current man. They have gotten away with murder, sometimes almost literally. (laughs) I mean, there is something sort of weird about this. When you look back at the last group of Republican presidents, starting with Nixon, I could even include Eisenhower, but I'll start with Nixon, you've had major constitutional issues that have been brought up with respect to the decisions made by every one of them except Gerald Ford. You had Nixon with the Watergate scandal, which raised constitutional issues. Ford took his place. Then the next Republican president was Reagan, when you had Iran-Contra, which raised constitutional issues, where the Congress totally fell down in terms of doing anything about that. At least with Nixon they bit the bullet on that. George Bush the First was involved in Iran-Contra and he got away scot-free. Reagan at least had to make a speech in which he defended the arms-for-hostages deal by saying that he didn't know it was arms-for-hostages, which of course was ridiculous. And then he ran an "off-the-books" foreign policy via Bill Casey's CIA to deliver the proceeds from the arms sales to the Contras in Nicaragua. It was an impeachable offense, and George Bush the First was deeply involved in it. But nobody took him to task for it, either before he became president or when he became president. Now we have the current George Bush who is raising serious constitutional issues himself.

I don't know what it is about these Republican presidents. I mean, Clinton got impeached over a sex scandal, for goodness sake. It makes no sense to me that the Congress would pay so much attention to worrying about the president obeying the law before a grand jury proceedings where they are asking him about his sex life, as opposed to a president who seems to be lying through his teeth twice a week when he meets with people from the Congress or the public. It just seems that the history of Republican presidents over the last few decades has been rather horrendous with respect to constitutional protection.

Let me pick another topic. We did some work on adding a cabinet-level department. We took the Veterans Administration and converted it into the Department of Veterans' Affairs. It was not something that we thought was needed or what we wanted to do. It isn't something anybody wanted to do except a very small number of people in the Congress. For many years since World War II, despite the entreaties of people in the Veterans Administration and with various veterans groups lobbying, the

Congress never took the subject up. Mostly they allowed the executive branch, through the president, either to ignore the issue or to say why it was not a good idea. What happened was that these veterans groups, these fairly powerful lobbying groups, had a meeting with Ronald Reagan—I don't remember exactly what year this was—and he off-the-cuff told them that he was in favor of a department. That basically was the ball game. Once the president said he was in favor there wasn't a congressman who was going to stand up and say he's opposed to having a Department of Veterans Affairs. (laughs)

The expense of conversion was fairly high by some standards. It wasn't monstrous, but even the cost of just changing the name outside of buildings and on the stationery and on whatever documents were going to be produced was just wasted money. But the Governmental Affairs Committee had the jurisdiction of dealing with new cabinet departments so the bill came to us and we dealt with it. I frankly didn't want to touch it with a ten-foot pole myself, personally, but I had no choice. I gave the assignment to Paul Light. He got to work on this bill, which I worked on part-time with him. We had to deal with a fellow named Jonathan Steinberg, who was on the staff of the Veterans' Affairs Committee. Alan Cranston was the chairman and Steinberg was the staff director. Steinberg had been around working on these veterans' issues for 15 years by that time and we were total novices. We really didn't know the agency at all. But we set to work on this bill. Then it became apparent pretty soon that we had to deal with Steinberg, and he and Paul did not get along at all. I attended some of these meetings where issues had to be hashed out, and the tension in the room was palpable. You could cut it with a knife. In the end, Steinberg got pretty much everything he wanted in that bill. We really had no choice because number one, we didn't know the issues as well as he did, and number two, he had been dealing with all these veterans lobbying groups for all these years, and so he was really carrying their water. There was no way in the world that we were going to be able to push through a bill that those groups didn't like. So in the end, we caved.

Paul got something out of it. First of all he wrote a book about converting the department from Veterans Administration to the Department of Veterans Affairs.<sup>8</sup> But his book doesn't reveal that we did it kicking and screaming all the way. By the way, my hiring of Paul illustrated something about the culture in Washington and on Capitol Hill. People who I knew had recommended him to me as somebody we ought to hire, because he was smart and he was interested in the structure of government. So I called him up and I interviewed him. Everything went fine. I brought up a number of issues—I remember the interview—and he responded the way I thought he should. And then at the end I said, "Well, we really want to have you. We can talk about money." He said the money wasn't that important to him. What was important to him was the title. That was kind of curious

<sup>8</sup> Paul C. Light, *Forging Legislation: The Politics of Veterans Reform* (New York: Norton, 1992).

to me, because at that point we only had maybe three titles of people on the staff. As far as I knew, those were the three titles that existed everywhere on Capitol Hill. Beyond the staff director or chief counsel, you were either a counsel, if you were a lawyer, a professional staff member if you were not a lawyer, and then there were the assistants, the secretaries and whatever. That was it. He didn't want any of those titles. He was not a lawyer. He said he needed to think about the title. From my perspective, I didn't care. I wanted to hire this guy and as far as I was concerned he could call himself the King of Timbuktu, it didn't matter to me as long as we were mutually agreeable on the salary.

He came back and said he wanted the title of consultant. I was kind of curious about that because to me that sounded like he wanted to seem as if he was outside the committee structure rather than inside it. Nonetheless, I called somebody up just to make sure that I wasn't doing something that was illegal by giving a full-time staff member the title of consultant. I was assured that it didn't matter what you called a person—from the point of view of the Senate offices, he was a professional staff member and that was that. Okay, I called him up and said, "No problem with the title consultant." Then I totally forgot about it. He worked with us for about two years, maybe, and then he went off somewhere else. He's now at Brookings by the way, and he's got some connection to NYU [Paulette Goddard Professor of Public Service, New York University]. When I got his book, I opened it up and by his picture on the bookflap on the back it said that he was a "senior consultant to the Governmental Affairs Committee," which of course he was not. He was a professional staff member working for John Glenn, who was the chairman, and he did not really work for the committee as a whole. Glenn was the one who signed his employment documents. Anyway, it told me something about how people manage to enhance their resumes in this town, something much less prevalent in the academic science community that I came from originally.

**RITCHIE:** Mentioning Senator Glenn, what was his role in the creation of the Department of Veterans' Affairs? As a veteran, I suppose he was supportive.

**WEISS:** He frankly didn't want to get involved with it either. I mean, there was no up-side to this, except of course the lobbyists for the veterans would thank you, and so forth, and I suppose there was some political benefit to that. But there wasn't so much political benefit for having done it as the political down-side would have been if he had opposed it. We told him he needed to do this, because Reagan had said that he was in favor of the department and all these groups were now running all over Capitol Hill, including into our offices, saying, "All right, when is this going to be done now that the president has said that he's in favor of it?" In the past, when we were lobbied, we used to say: "Well, if the president supports it, we will be glad to do something, but without the president's support we just can't get this thing started." But that excuse was completely wiped out by Reagan. There were some people who were outraged by it, including

Republicans who called the White House and said, “Why did you do this?” And the staff at the White House would say: “We didn’t do it. He had a meeting with these people and it just sort of slipped out. He said that he supported it. He had forgotten that we told him this was not something he should say.” (laughs) So, anyway, that’s how a cabinet-level department gets done in Washington. The president makes a slip of the tongue and all of a sudden you’ve got a new bureaucracy!

**RITCHIE:** What’s the advantage to the veterans to be cabinet level? Just to have somebody sitting at the table with the president?

**WEISS:** That’s all. There was no particular advantage except that it just gave additional cache to the head of the Department of Veterans’ Affairs who could then be in the meetings at the White House and tell the veterans constituency that he’s sitting up there with the president. From a practical point of view, I don’t think it’s made any difference.

**RITCHIE:** Ironically, Reagan had come into office promising to abolish a couple of cabinet offices.

**WEISS:** That’s correct. That was of course the irony of the whole thing that the man who had come into office wanting to have a smaller government ended up enlarging it. But that brings up another issue with respect to cabinet-level departments. A few years later, a push began among the Republicans to get rid of some cabinet-level departments. Maybe they were embarrassed by the fact that the VA had come in under Reagan’s watch and now they wanted to do something to show that they really did mean to have a smaller government. It must have been in connection with Bob Dole’s campaign, where some Republicans and I think maybe he himself had advocated getting rid of some cabinet-level departments. Among them was the Department of Energy, the Department of Education, HUD [Housing and Urban Development], and the Environmental Protection Agency. I’m not sure if a bill had actually been introduced to do it at that point, but certainly the Republicans were looking for support to have it done. Any bill to do that would have come to the Governmental Affairs Committee.

I remember a meeting that I was in with Glenn and Ted Stevens. Stevens was carrying Dole’s water on this notion. As I say, Dole had not announced for president at that point, but it was a time when everybody was assuming that he was going to be throwing his hat in the ring and probably would get the nomination. We had this meeting and Stevens was very strong about getting Glenn’s support for getting rid of four cabinet-level departments. I’m not sure if they were mentioned at this point. They just said, “We’re not going to say which ones they are, but we should reduce the government by four departments.” I think everybody sort of understood which departments were likely to be in there. We knew that DOE and Education would certainly be among them. They had

talked about getting rid of the Department of Education for years at that point. The Department of Energy was a pain in the neck to them as well. They wanted to fold the energy side of the department (as opposed to the nuclear weapons side) into the Interior Department. We suspected that they might want to fold EPA into Interior as well. We had this meeting that went on for a little while and it became apparent that Glenn was not interested in doing this. Stevens put on his little show of indignation and anger, but it didn't matter. We weren't going to do that and we didn't do that. As it turned out, of course, the idea went nowhere.

What we did do, however, was something on the other side. We supported the notion of raising the Environmental Protection Agency to cabinet-level status. Joe Lieberman had put in a bill to do that, which we supported. We held some hearings on it and we worked to get it out of the committee, but it didn't go anywhere. The Republican administration wouldn't support it. By the time Clinton got in, and by the time we were finished with the health care business, the Republicans now had the Congress, so there was no way you could get it done. Once again, how important would it have been for EPA to be a cabinet-level agency? Mostly symbolic, at least telling the world that the United States thinks that environmental protection is so important that we think it ought to be a cabinet-level department. So I did work on that and I did get Lieberman's bill pushed through the committee, for which I got a note of thanks from Katy McGinty (head of the Council on Environmental Quality), which I guess I showed you. So that's what we did on cabinet-level departments. What else should I talk about?

Okay, I do have a number of cats and dogs to talk about and I don't know how much you want to hear. One thing that I think is important, at least as a function of how much time we spent on it, was a bill called the Federal Financial Management Improvement Act. That was as much a creature of the GAO as it was of our committee. Chuck Bowsher, who was the controller general and whom I really got to know and like a great deal, was very concerned about the state of financial management of the federal government and he would lose no opportunity to come and talk about it to Glenn or to the staff. We worked with the GAO to produce a bill. It ended up as a bill which reorganized OMB to some extent. Mostly what we did was we created a deputy director of OMB for management. We created a chief financial officer for the federal government, which it had never had before. And that was translated later into having chief financial officers in all the major agencies, similar to the IGs, and then we created an assistant director of OMB for financial matters. Now, what were these people supposed to do? Well, first of all the CFO was supposed to come up with standards for the federal government to do financial management. The deputy director of OMB, which was a job that was held by Phil Lader, under Clinton, was supposed to do oversight over every management issue in the federal government except for budget matters.

The end result was that we forced the agencies to produce a financial report every year, which some of them said was impossible to do. They said they would never be able to get a clean opinion from GAO, which was supposed to examine these reports, because they said that the systems in place to really do financial management were just not good enough. They didn't have the resources. They didn't have the equipment. The information technology that you needed in order to keep track of all the programs was not in very good shape. Nonetheless, we said: "You have to start doing this. Presumably, the federal government will provide the money to carry this out." The fact of the matter is that none of them have ever had the appropriate funds to do it. Some have done okay, mostly the smaller agencies. The larger agencies still are having great difficulties with it.

The Department of Defense will *never* get this done, but we forced them to put their nose to the grindstone and at least take a look at these issues to see what they could do about it. The Department of Defense is so large and the rules are so lax in many ways that I don't see how you could get a handle on this. It's kind of funny. I say the rules are lax and they are, but at the same time the Department of Defense is better than all the other major agencies because they *have* rules. They have rules in terms of how they are supposed to interact with their contractors, and by and large they try to follow those rules. The problem is that they frequently let the contractors get away with things that they probably shouldn't, and the Congress to a large extent goes along with this—in fact, in some cases, demands it on the basis of pressure coming from the contractors. Doing good financial management is a difficult problem for any agency which has to depend on contractors for most of its work. The Department of Defense is one. The Department of Energy is another. NASA is a particularly egregious example of that. Ninety percent of all of the work that NASA does is done by contractors.

When the space program was first started, NASA had an in-house group of people who were really very knowledgeable, and could do the work, and could oversee the work that contractors did in a particularly good way because they understood the technology. They knew what was being done. Now they are totally dependent on contractors. There is absolutely no way—they would have to hire other contractors to oversee the contractors that get the contracts. This is how bad it is. Under those conditions, you end up with a situation where you have periodic scandals, where contractors have not done what they were supposed to do, or have done shoddy work and gotten away with it. The rules of the federal government with respect to the review of contractors appear to be more often broken than they are carried out. You are supposed to bar contractors from other contracts if you have caught them in some kind of contractual chicanery, but it doesn't happen. If you are dependent upon these contractors, you are just not going to cut them off because you would essentially be ending the work that is part of your mission. So NASA isn't going to tell Boeing that it can't have a contract anymore. The Department of Defense isn't going to tell Lockheed Martin it can't have a contract anymore. To some



extent as contractual work has expanded, and as the number of in-house experts has declined, the federal government has become so dependent on these people that it ends up costing taxpayers huge amounts of money in additional expense, more than ought to be the case, in order to get the work done.

When you see all of that, and then you have all of these pressures being made by Congress to keep expanding contractual authority, to keep taking jobs away from what's being done in-house and giving them to outside contractors, that makes no sense to me whatsoever based upon my observations while I was in the Congress. But nevertheless that's where it is.

**RITCHIE:** When you were dealing with financial matters like this, did you have to deal with the Appropriations Committee at all?

**WEISS:** We had to deal with the Appropriations Committee in the following sense: they ultimately had to supply the money for the agencies to carry out their tasks. But the authorizations were ours alone. We didn't have to get involved with the Appropriations Committee in telling the agencies what they needed to do in terms of doing financial management. We just told them: "Here's what you're required to do. You have to produce these reports. The reports have to say thus and such. And they will be reviewed by the GAO, and so forth." The Appropriations Committee, of course, could have put a total halt to all of this by simply not appropriating any money for the agencies to upgrade their information technology or anything of that nature.

**RITCHIE:** I wondered about it in the sense that the Appropriations subcommittees sort of perform financial oversight over the agencies by calling them up to testify and scrutinizing them. I wondered if there was any turf battle at all involved in that?

**WEISS:** I don't recall any. We did not have any turf battle with Appropriations on financial management issues. We had turf battles on other things, sometimes, but not on that.

**RITCHIE:** One of the problems with all of the executive agencies is that their appropriations are set annually by the Appropriations Committee and they're really at the mercy of that committee.

**WEISS:** Right. But you also have to understand that we had a couple of senior members from Appropriations on our committee. Ted Stevens was on our committee. I think Bill Roth was on Appropriations, and he was on our committee. We had Dan Inouye on our committee as well as on Appropriations. We had some war horses. Obviously, if there had been a jurisdictional problem it would have come up right away

because those senators would have raised it. This way they had a bite of both apples. They could work the authorization side on our committee and then work the appropriations side when they over there.

Here is another issue that is related but not part of financial management. We did a number of hearings on financial controls by DOD over their contractors, not in relation to the CFO Act but in relation to: do they know what kind of inventories they've got, or what the contractors have, in terms of government-furnished equipment and the like? It turned out that basically they didn't. There was so much equipment that was being ordered every year that it was the old story—I think it's become almost a cliché now—that it's like you have this big building owned by a contractor and they have been given a contract to do something by DOD, so they start by ordering stuff. On the other hand, they've got stuff that they've gotten in the past that they could use, but DOD doesn't know or care about that. It doesn't have any controls over it. So they push that stuff out the backdoor as the same stuff comes in the front door on a new contract. We played some games with it, where we could show that there was a warehouse somewhere which had tens of thousands of these lights that police mount on their cars—you know, flashing lights—well, the military has lights like that, too. So they had enough lights to outfit the army three times over, and they were still ordering more. It was that kind of thing.

A not very amusing aspect of that, however, was this also turned out to be the case with more serious equipment like Stingers, where the Defense Department had ordered thousands of these handheld, shoulder-fired weapons, which are used, among other things, to bring down helicopters. We gave quite a large number of these to the Mujahideen in Afghanistan when they were fighting the Russians. After that war was over, we tried to get them back, and we couldn't. In fact, we sent somebody over there to buy them back from the Mujahideen, and he was only able to get back—we gave them something like 2,500 of those things and he got back about 500. Where did the rest of them go? Well, we know that some of them were sold to Iran. Who has the rest, I don't know. Maybe the Taliban had some of them as well. So we tried to get DOD to tell us just how well are they keeping track of these weapons. It turned out they tracked them by serial numbers. If they found one somewhere, I suppose they could probably determine whether it was one of theirs, or because the Russians were producing them too. In any case, there were thousands of these things and they're floating around all over the world now. It's a classified number as a matter of fact, or at least it used to be classified, I assume it still is, as to how many were produced and how many were sold around the world. Let's put it this way: it's a *big* number. I'm afraid that one of these days an airliner is going to be brought down by one of these things.

**RITCHIE:** You held these investigations to point out how lax their procedures were. Did that have any effect on the DOD?

**WEISS:** Well, yes and no. At the time, one of the people who was involved was John Hamre, who is now the head of CSIS [Center for Strategic and International Studies]. I knew him when he was a staff member on the Armed Services Committee, and then thanks to Sam Nunn he worked himself into a job as comptroller of DOD. Since Glenn was on the Armed Services Committee, he knew John Hamre, so whenever we would start complaining about these issues, Hamre would call up and say he wanted to come over and talk to us, which he would. So we'd have a discussion with him and Glenn about some of these issues and he would say he was working on it and he was going to improve the system. I think he did a few things, but there was no real major improvement. You could hold these hearings from now till doomsday but when push comes to crunch you have to have some sort of an enforcement mechanism in order to make something happen. There are some agencies of government who basically you can't do anything to, because their support on Capitol Hill is just too strong. It's not just their support, it's also the contractors, and the people who work for the contractors. That's why the Department of Defense *never* gives a contract that just goes to one place in one state. Any big project is just fanned out all over the country so you create a constituency for it and a group of lobbyists that will make it impossible to really ride herd on the contractor, or ride herd on the agency for that matter.

If a political issue arises with respect to an agency, the normal allies of the agency are willing to turn on them, but usually it's just temporary. A good example of that is the intelligence agencies and the Intelligence Committee. The Intelligence Committee is a lapdog, always has been, with respect to the intelligence agencies. But, every once in a while when there is a screw-up that occurs, then all of a sudden a big show is made of doing oversight, which is what's happening now with the Iraq situation. Under normal circumstances, you can't touch the intelligence community, the Intelligence Committees will protect them, and they do. It's an aspect of our government which I have always found very disturbing. There's always a question of balance. There may be some things which you need to keep secret in order to ensure security, but it's always seemed to me to be excessive, and particularly so in the last few years, but it's been bad all the time. There has never been a time when I thought it was appropriately balanced. Some people have said if you took all the classified documents that the government has in its possession and looked at them, at least 80 percent of them would be things for which there was no need to have classification.

**RITCHIE:** People have called it "national insecurity" rather than national security.

**WEISS:** Right. But it works even at the highest levels. The intelligence agencies have a reflex action whenever somebody wants to raise an issue, and it is: we can't talk about it because it would compromise sources and methods. I ran into so many things

where it was clear there would be no compromise of sources and methods. It's a mantra which they recite in order to keep the investigators away, in order to hide what it is they're doing because either they're doing something illegal or they're doing something which would be embarrassing to somebody. I think that problem is getting worse. Now that we've got the terrorism issue before us the problem has gotten much worse, and I don't know where it's heading but I'm very concerned about the whole notion of democracy in America now.

What else? One other thing we handled, on environmental issues we did a number of hearings that really did have an impact, examining the Department of Energy's environmental policies, particularly at the sites where materials for nuclear weapons were made. We paid a lot of attention to what was happening at Hanford. All the reactors had been shut down. They had these tanks which were loaded with highly radioactive waste materials. The tanks were leaking. There is a plume which in fact is moving and has been moving for many years now toward the Columbia River and at some point will reach it. They have tried to deal with it—and they have dealt with it to some extent. First they built double wall tanks in order to hold the materials, so if they leaked from one tank the second tank would hold it. They introduced some chemicals to turn the liquid waste into sludge. And now they're solidifying it, as I understand it, and at some point will vitrify it, turn it into radioactive glass, and then will store it forever, or until there is a repository somewhere where it can be placed. But the terrible story about it is that they kept this secret for years. The question of leakage at the tanks was exposed by whistleblowers who worked at the agency, who worked at Hanford. It was only when whistleblowers made contact with us that we were able to do any kind of serious investigation of this, and induced us among other things to work on the Whistleblower Protection Act, which we did, and which got vetoed by the president when it finally passed. I'm not even sure what the status of whistleblower protection is at the moment, but we tried to bump it up significantly and did not succeed.

Let's see, oh, yes, I talked about the Defense Nuclear Facility Safety Board. What I did not remember was exactly how that board came about. We actually introduced a bill to create it, called the Nuclear Protections and Safety Act of 1987. We held hearings on it and we got it through the committee. Part of it went to the Energy Committee and we had to deal with them. The bill itself did not get enacted, but they were willing to take a small part of it and attach it to another bill that was going to get passed. That small part included the Defense Nuclear Facility Safety Board. So we got the board. The thing we didn't get, however, was we had given the board significant power in the bill that we wrote, but they didn't want the board to have that kind of power. In our bill the board would have had the power to actually shut down a facility if there were violations and the violations were not cleaned up the way the board wanted. The board is in existence but it has no authority to shut down anything. It tries to get something done simply by

exposure, which is not an inconsiderable power. Nobody likes to have an official government document come out that says there are safety violations at this facility and something should be done about it. So they've had some success in using that authority in order to get the Department of Energy to do what needs to be done from a safety and environmental standpoint.

[A couple of years after the DNFSB was created, I received a call from a presidential assistant named Greg Simon to meet with him at the White House. When I arrived, he said they were going to nominate me for a slot on the board. But although I was deeply concerned about nuclear safety, I thought the limited power of the board meant it would ultimately be coopted by those who were more concerned with the smooth operation of the machinery of nuclear weapons production. That plus the belief that I could be effective on a broader range of nuclear issues from within the Senate along with the fact that the appointment would have meant a lower level of salary than I was then receiving caused me to turn it down.]

Dealing with John Glenn on the environment was an interesting thing. He, like a lot of people, has a sort of automatic notion of wanting to protect the environment. Nobody wants dirty air. Nobody wants unclean water. But when push came to crunch, if you were talking about environmental protection that might interfere with a significant industry or with national security, he was not so quick to be supportive. Every once in a while he would bring up—especially when we would talk about health and safety regulation—he had a bug in him about aspects of health and safety regulation because of his experience when he was a board member or had some high-level job with Royal Crown Cola, after he was an astronaut. Royal Crown was among those soft drink companies that were using saccharin as a sweetener. There was this big thing that took place in those years where one of the federal agencies decided that saccharin was either a carcinogen or was otherwise a toxic substance in another way. They banned the use of saccharin. This caused a huge cry among the companies that were using it in their soft drinks, and apparently cost Royal Crown a lot of money, including a drop in its stock price, and Glenn was holding stock options in that company. Years later, research showed saccharin wasn't so dangerous. So he was particularly aggrieved by it. We're talking many years later now, but he would bring that up every time we talked about health and safety regulations, about how "agencies go too far and here's an example," and he would bring up that the saccharin business all over again.

It didn't stop him, however, in pushing for approval of Proctor and Gamble's production of Olestra as a food additive later, because they were an important constituent of his. I remember when I read about Olestra, there was no way in the world I would *ever* eat anything that contained this stuff! (laughs) It caused a lot of people who did ingest it to have a reaction to it, which mostly consisted of diarrhea, because it's a substitute for

fat. Actually, it is a fat, but it runs through your system, and sometimes it take a lot of stuff with it. Proctor and Gamble had a court fight over Olestra with the FDA [Food and Drug Administration], but finally they did approve it. Shortly afterwards, the company sent a bunch of boxes of cookies with Olestra in them to the office. One of the staff people in Glenn's personal staff had come by offering everybody, "Would you like an Olestra cookie?" When they came to me, I said, "No thank you, I've already been regular this morning. I don't need it." (laughs) He also had a—I suppose some people might have thought it a term of endearment, but it was really an epithet—he would refer to supporters of environmental protection as "bugs and bunny people."

**RITCHIE:** As a scientist working in the government, which is so unscientific, did you have any qualms about the way science policy was being devised?

**WEISS:** I didn't have qualms in terms of how policy was devised as much as I had about the way in which science was used. You're seeing a replay of it now. It happens in every administration but it's particularly bad now. It's always been the case that when you are doing particularly regulatory action and you need scientific data in order to know what to do, you're never going to have data which is absolute in terms of telling you what the truth is. There is always going to be some probability that the data is wrong. Sometimes the probability is high and sometimes the probability is low. The whole idea behind regulatory protection ought to be that you do the best you can based upon whatever the empirical data shows. If the data is telling you that with a probability of, say, .8 or .9 that you are doing the right thing by regulating a substance out of the food chain, you should do it, because the risk of being wrong isn't worth it. You've got data on your side and you ought to take action. Nonetheless, other people always can make an argument that the data isn't complete. That's the argument over smoking that we had for 40 years before something was finally done about it. It's true in every case. There is virtually no area of public policy where science can tell you absolutely what the truth is. You do the best you can.

There are some cases where it's more apparent than others. The evolution debate is certainly one of them. There you are talking about something that is science versus something that is not. So there should be no argument about that. The arguments occur where both sides can legitimately claim they are looking at scientific data and the data says different things to the two people. This is the argument that industry always has, whether you are talking about acid rain or whether you are talking about global warming, or anything of that nature, there is always data that you can point to that seems to suggest something other than what the mainstream opinion is. It may very well be that on occasion that turns out to be right, but again, when you are doing public policy, if you don't want to be utterly paralyzed by that, you have to say, "Okay, as a matter of public policy we will do the best we can with the data that we have." If the data appears to be

particularly strong, that's the side we ought to come down on, while leaving open the possibility in our minds that we may have to change the policy later because of new data that comes along that suggests that what we did does not really cover all of the possibilities.

Does that mean that therefore there is no role for a scientist in government because you are never going to have a scientifically pure issue? No, I would say the role of the scientist in government should be not that different from the role of anybody else who is coming to an issue with a notion of logic and some notion of how to interpret data. I would not say that only a scientist has the right to do this, or has the ability to do this. A very smart layman can also do it. When you start getting into the nitty-gritty of how data is produced, then a person with a scientific background might be more useful than a lawyer, let's say, but that person has to be ensconced in the field in which the data is produced. Now, the chance of a scientist working on Capitol Hill being in that position is very low. You don't have scientists working in all of these fields working on Capitol Hill, but a person with a scientific background does have some degree of literacy with respect to other scientific disciplines besides his own. You learn to recognize bullshit, shall we say, a little better perhaps than some other people might, when scientific claims are made. Or if scientific claims are made, you know where to go and who to talk to in order to see whether this is a legitimate claim. And you know how to evaluate what you're being told by the second person who you go to. So it does help.

Yes, I would say that being a scientist is not frustrating if you are working on Capitol Hill as long as you recognize that you're always dealing in imperfection, and you're always dealing with value systems that are coming into play in the making of decisions that have nothing whatever to do with making scientific decisions. Ultimately, a congressman votes his conscience, if he has one, and he votes his constituent interests as well. There's an interplay among those things that may cause him to vote against the scientific mainstream on an issue. As a scientist, you may not like it, and I certainly did not when that would happen, but I understood why it was being done. I didn't feel frustrated as a scientist because people were doing that. All I had to do was look around me and see the level of ignorance about scientific issues. Not only scientific issues, but the level of ignorance about how the government really works.

I've always believed that one of the major failures in the U.S. was the failure to tell young people how the government really does work. They grow up believing a fairy story, and as a result end up not voting their own interests, it seems to me. It's part of Thomas Frank's book, *What's the Matter with Kansas*.<sup>9</sup> That bothers me a lot more than

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas: How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004)

seeing that somebody on Capitol Hill is not paying as much attention to scientific data as perhaps they should.

Just recently, I was invited to help some of the NGOs [Non-Government Organizations] here in town who are concerned about the reprocessing of nuclear spent fuel, because the administration is interested in extracting plutonium from spent fuel. There's an industry that really wants to make use of it. I guess we've talked in the past about how plutonium can be used for weapons and so forth, so it's a dangerous thing. They asked me if I would be willing to accompany some young people up to Capitol Hill to talk to a couple of congressmen and tell them what I knew about the issue. I wasn't going to lobby for anything one way or the other, but I was willing to tell what I knew scientifically about the process of reprocessing, and what alternatives there exist for extracting nuclear energy. It turns out that there's a lot of uranium in seawater, for example. There are studies that have been done by reputable people suggesting that you could get a kilogram of uranium out of seawater for a cost of about \$250. Well, it turns out that extracting plutonium from spent fuel and bringing it around to the front of the reactor, in essence using it as a fuel, when you look at what the price of uranium needs to be in order to make that process economically competitive, the price of uranium has to be somewhere in the order of \$400 a kilogram. So before you get to the point where that becomes economically attractive, you could extract all the uranium you want out of seawater at a lower price, and therefore there is no need to actually reprocess spent fuel.

Well, I went to Capitol Hill. I told people about this. Everybody was very interested and surprised, because I was talking to people who were not necessarily opposed, they just didn't know. They were repeating what the industry had told them. I gave them an alternative, in other words, and a reference. By and large they took it seriously. So a scientist can be useful in that respect. As long as you don't compromise your own—that's the other thing you have to worry about—you have to worry about compromising your own integrity by only selecting parts of the data that might exist in order to make a case. I don't have to worry about that in the role that I was going to Capitol Hill for here because all these people had already been briefed by the industry as to what the industry said the truth was, and I was giving them an alternative to look at. But in my own work, when I was working on Capitol Hill, I would never take on an issue where I felt I had to fudge the data in order to make a favored policy viable. I just wouldn't do it. And John Glenn never asked me to do it. So I felt perfectly good about the work that I did.

**RITCHIE:** You came to Capitol Hill as a science fellow originally.

**WEISS:** That's right.

**RITCHIE:** Did you deal with science fellows over the years?



**WEISS:** Oh, yes.

**RITCHIE:** And did you feel they make a contribution to the Hill?

**WEISS:** Yes, I think they do. I would say generally speaking the science fellows have been a real good thing for Capitol Hill. Certainly the ones that were contemporaneous with me, I had a great deal of respect for. Every once in a while I still run into some of them and we've remained friends.

**RITCHIE:** I've thought that there were two results of a fellowship. One is that they bring knowledge with them, and the other is that they take knowledge back when they return to their universities.

**WEISS:** Yes. Well, interestingly, because the job market has become so difficult for professionals in the sciences—in the past the career path was you got a Ph.D., you did a post-doc or something somewhere, and then you got a job as an assistant professor and then you went up the ladder in academic life. Or you went to work in a research laboratory somewhere, or possibly an industry. Now, getting on a tenure track is a very difficult thing to do. You now have young scientists who are bouncing from one post-doc to another, really just a series of temporary jobs of one to two years at the most until they finally land something which has some degree of permanence to it, mostly not in the academic world anymore. It's just become too competitive. There aren't enough of those jobs around. So when we talk about these fellows, first of all, I was unusual in the sense that I was older. I was the only full professor who was a fellow. Everybody else who was coming from an academic institution, which was most of them, were usually people who had just gotten degrees or were people who were working at the assistant professor level, and mostly they didn't have tenure. In that sense I was on the outer fringe because of that. I didn't have to worry about coming back to something. I had a tenured appointment. As long as the university was willing to let me do this thing, I had something to come back to. That wasn't true of a lot of them. A lot of people who come up in these positions end up staying because they don't have anywhere else to go. But the nice thing about that, however, is that you end up with many more people on Capitol Hill who have those kinds of backgrounds, and they are useful.

I think as many as 25 to 30 percent stay. That was the last figure I saw somewhere. It's a healthy percentage. Some of those people now, when they get the fellowship, want to spend it in a place where they think there will be a job waiting for them once the fellowship year is up. In my case, the funny thing about me was I never gave it a thought when I came up there. I wasn't thinking about staying at all. I just thought I would have a good time doing these interesting things, which I always wanted to do anyway. It was sort of a surprise to me when I finally realized that staying was not

only more fun but I'll be in a position to make a real contribution to society as opposed to writing a bunch of papers that very few people will end up reading.

Okay, what else did we do?

[The ongoing public interest in the 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy became elevated in 1991 by the release of the Oliver Stone film "JFK". Since the Governmental Affairs Committee had jurisdiction over the National Archives and there was continuing controversy over the handling of the growing collection of official information related to the assassination, we decided to do a bill to bring some order to the process of information collection and storage regarding the event. I hired a lawyer named Steve Katz to lead the effort and we produced the JFK Assassination Records Collection Act of 1992. The Act provided for a board of well-qualified presidentially appointed members to review all government records concerning the assassination and to facilitate the transmission of such records to the Archivist of the United States as well as the public disclosure of such records. The board worked for about four years before a sunset provision in the law required termination. A final report of 227 pages was issued in September 1998 containing a comprehensive description of the board's work and a list of ten recommendations for improving the system of collection, declassification, and storage of government records related to the assassination as well as future declassification boards more generally.]

Another effort I would like to mention is a bill introduced by Senator [Spark] Matsunaga to implement the recommendations of the Wartime Relocation and Internment Commission about the Japanese internment. I was very sensitive to that bill. It was something I thought needed to be done. It called for an apology and it called for reparations. I was absolutely shocked by John Glenn's response to this bill. He *hated* it. He did not want to do it. He fought in World War II. He had the attitude that a lot of World War II veterans of the Pacific Theater had about the Japanese. The fact that these Japanese were American citizens should have made a big difference, but somehow he had a little trouble getting past the ethnicity. But in the end he did it. He really had no choice, politically. There were people who opposed that bill. The argument was that if you were going to do that, shouldn't you have a reparations bill for blacks, and shouldn't you have one for Indians, and so on. But there was no bill to do that for blacks or Indians. The Indians in fact had the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the federal government, regardless of how corrupt it was.

Glenn would make these references, not in public, of course, but in private about the Japanese and their "meatball" flag. (laughs) When I first heard it, I thought, meatball flag? What is he talking about? The I realized it's not the rising sun to him, it's a meatball! That's what he was talking about. I kept telling him passing this bill was

something which we needed to do. So he ended up doing it and we got it passed. It was enacted.

**RITCHIE:** It's hard for a nation to admit that it made a mistake and to apologize for a piece of its history.

**WEISS:** Yes, that's always the case, and it's understandable. I don't know what it is, but I'm very disappointed in the attitude of a lot of my fellow Americans about this. There is a visceral dislike of people we have fought against in war, people who had nothing whatever to do with the war, nothing whatever to do with those unhappy events, and it's particularly true about the Vietnamese. So many Americans hate the Vietnamese. Why do they hate the Vietnamese? Because they beat us. They don't say that's why we hate them, they have other reasons. But it's hard to make peace in this world. People just find reasons to hate other people, even when there is no legitimate reason to do so. I could understand maybe one generation. If you had a loved one who was killed in a war, or killed by a Vietnamese soldier, you're not going to feel too good about those people, I suppose. How long should it last? That war has now been over for 30 years. We're not talking about people who fought in the war, we're talking about a new generation of people. It doesn't make any sense to me. But it's there. Now, we're seeing a replay of that, only now it's with Muslims, because of 9/11.

I guess the last thing on my list here is about the work we did on relief for the homeless. This was not generated by me or by Glenn. This was generated by a staff member who I hired named Michael Slater, who was having trouble getting a job on Capitol Hill. He came to work on Glenn's personal staff for a short while and then for whatever reason they couldn't keep him and he was looking around for a job, and I hired him. I had gotten to know him a little bit while he was on the personal staff, I liked him, and we had a lot of issues he could be useful in helping us to do. So I hired him, and he was helpful on the things that we wanted him to do, but he generated some of his own work. He was particularly concerned about the homeless. He wanted to work on that and I said fine. We had to do some stuff on reauthorization of the McKinney Act, which dealt with homeless issues, and he worked on this pretty assiduously, and did some things that turned out to be really good. One of the things that we ended up doing because of Michael was to open up surplus federal buildings as homeless shelters. It was impossible for us to simply take a surplus federal building and immediately make it a homeless shelter, but there was a procedure in place for states and municipalities to be able to use surplus federal buildings. Basically, all we ended up doing was we said if the states and municipalities pass on wanting to do it, one could use the building, turn it into a shelter for the homeless, so we did that.

That's basically all I have to talk about unless there's something you want to talk about. We got involved in lots of other issues which I haven't really said much about. The North American Free Trade Agreement, one aspect of it came to us for implementation legislation. I had an economist on the staff who worked on that, but we didn't do anything major on it. I didn't have much to do with it myself.

**RITCHIE:** It's such a smorgasbord of issues that came to that committee.

**WEISS:** Oh, wait, there is one more issue. Wait a minute. I didn't mention the Presidential Transition Act. Let me just say a word about that. This also involves Paul Light. Now this was an issue that Paul brought with him when he came to the committee. He asked me whether he could do some work on that, and I said, "Oh, sure, it's in Governmental Affairs' jurisdiction." We ended up producing a bill to improve what was already on the books for presidential transitions. Once we got involved with it, I told Paul that one of the things I want to do is to try to get private money out of the presidential transition system if possible. "See if you can write a bill that simply gets rid of it, that makes it illegal." Couldn't do it. Just couldn't do it. I mean, we could write a bill but it just wasn't going to go anywhere. It became apparent pretty quickly that nobody wanted to do that, and particularly the Clintonites didn't want to do it. So there was no way this was going to happen.

Instead, the best we could do was to ask for disclosure of contributions so that you knew who was giving what. I don't know what the status of that is right now, because we did get something enacted. I thought what we had gotten enacted was that there would be a report that would show who gave what, but it may not have included in-kind contributions. I know we had some trouble with it. We couldn't get the complete disclosure we wanted. I just can't remember some of the details, but I know we thought we had improved the system and we thought we had put some kind of a cap on it. And there is no cap anymore. I don't know whether that was as a result of legislation that passed since I left the Senate or what. So the presidential transition system is still in a bit of disarray.

**RITCHIE:** Do you think it's unseemly for the incoming president to be asking for funds from people who are probably going to be asking him for things?

**WEISS:** No question about it. It isn't that he asks for the money, it's that everybody who wants to have a favor is going to provide money, and it does count, and the limits are not campaign limits. You can give zero in the presidential campaign but you can give a huge amount of money without any kind of restriction for the presidential transition. So in some sense, it's an even bigger scandal than the campaign system. We tried to do something about it, but did not really succeed.

**RITCHIE:** Your committee does strike me as a big smorgasbord. It can touch on anything that the federal government does. Probably freshmen senators coming in, when they are lobbying for committee assignments, that's not a committee that's high on their list, in the sense of them asking, "I want to get on the Governmental Affairs Committee."

**WEISS:** Correct.

**RITCHIE:** But when they get on the committee it really is a blank check to investigate pretty much anything you want, or look into any aspect of the federal government.

**WEISS:** That's right, but see it's very dependent on the nature of the chairman and the chairman's staff. You can have a committee like that which does nothing. Or just looks at a lot of little piddling stuff that nobody really cares about and doesn't really make much of a difference to anybody. I have to say that at least some of the time when Bill Roth was chairman that's exactly what was going on. The committee lost its visibility because Roth did not take on big issues. He had interests in other things and the committee was useful for him for those things, but it wasn't something that anybody else really paid much attention to. Whereas we came in with a lot of ideas and we had the intent of trying to make the committee a player in some of the big issues in Washington the best we could. I appreciate Glenn's chairmanship for that reason. There weren't very many things that I wanted to do that he said no to. That's was very helpful to me.

You asked before whether I was frustrated as a scientist. I would have been terribly frustrated not as a scientist but simply as somebody trying to do something about public policy if I saw all these things that I could possibly get into that I just couldn't do anything about because the guy I was reporting to just was totally adamant about keeping to a narrow agenda.

**RITCHIE:** Well, you had Mr. Checklist.

**WEISS:** I produced the checklist for Mr. Checklist.

### **End of the Sixth Interview**

Weiss meets President Bill Clinton and Vice President Al Gore at the White House, August 3, 1993.



Weiss (background) observes as Vice President Al Gore meets with Senators Glenn, Kennedy, Mikulski, and Riegel in Gore's White House office, July 17, 1993.

Weiss with Vice President Al Gore in Gore's White House office, February 10, 1997.



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SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
WASHINGTON, THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

26 AUG 1994

Dear Mr. Weiss,

I want to tell you how pleased I am by the Senate's passage of the Federal Acquisition Streamlining Act of 1994. Your extraordinary staff work made a significant difference.

Thank you for your active involvement in bringing this landmark legislation to fruition and congratulations on this historic achievement.

Sincerely,

*William J. Perry*

Mr. Leonard Weiss  
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Senate Governmental Affairs Committee  
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