SECRETARY OF THE SENATE
Interview #4
Wednesday, January 22, 1997

RITCHIE: I'd like to start today by asking about the relationship between the Secretary of the Senate and what happens on the floor of the Senate--since the people who work on the floor of the Senate largely work for the Secretary. We've talked about the administrative side of the job, but what is the Secretary's role in the Senate chamber?

JOHNSTON: Do you mean personally? It's really minimal. In practical terms the Secretary has little to do. Probably the most "significant" thing to do is to help open up each session, and that's not even a required item. I was never told when I became Secretary that it was a custom for the Secretary to escort or accompany the Pro Tem and the Chaplain into the chamber and then stand off to the side as the Chaplain read the morning prayer after being introduced by the Pro Tem. In fact, I would say it wasn't until probably a good three or four weeks after I'd been Secretary when I just happened one day to be walking into the chamber and as I routinely did, and Scott Bates came behind me and said, "By the way, I think it would be great if you were to come open the session. You don't have to do it all the time, but a lot of people are wondering what's happened to the Secretary."

That's when I learned there was a role. I don't think that my predecessor, Sheila Burke, had done it. I don't know whether Martha Pope did it or not. It's something I'm sure Joe Stewart did because Byrd would have insisted on it, it's my guess, Byrd being the stickler for tradition that he is. I was very sensitive in my early days and throughout my tenure of trying to preserve tradition and building on it as Secretary. I immediately made it a practice whenever possible to be there. Frankly, it was one of the best things I did from a personal standpoint because it was through that process that I was able to kind of renew my relationship with Senator Thurmond, who, of course, was there every morning to open up and gavel the session. I really, really adore and love the man. He's a wonderful teacher and a wonderful individual. And also to build a very good relationship with the Chaplain. He and I became very good friends. And it all began by me going every morning to escort them into the chamber.

It also gave me a chance to perform the second role which is to be the supervisor of a very good staff and to help make sure that things got off to a good start, or just to be there in case either Senator Dole or whoever was opening up that day needed some guidance or had a question. I discovered that being on the floor for me wasn't so much a duty or a workload thing, it was just good to be visible to senators, so if they had a question or a problem, there was the Secretary to talk to. On many occasions when things were fairly slow, roll call votes were the time to be on the floor, obviously. Many of the junior senators or somebody I was doing work with on a particular issue or item, would come to me and say, "Kelly let's talk about this issue." It was also a chance to say hello and keep my relationships going with other senators I'd gotten to know or had worked with in the past. So, being on the floor for me was a chance just to conduct business.

I was probably, from what I understand, more visible and more active on the floor than most recent secretaries. I don't think Joe Stewart was on the floor very much. Martha certainly wasn't. Sheila was, but in a different role as chief of staff to Senator Dole. I really made it a point of going over there and learning what was going on behind those desks at the dais, and learning Scott Bates' job and learning Kathy Alvarez's job and learning the parliamentarian's role, learning the journal clerk's role. I took their responsibilities very seriously. The one thing I regret is I'd always wanted to do a quorum call or a roll call vote before I stepped down but never really had a chance to do that. Scott and the people under his jurisdiction were all geared to have me do that. On occasion I would sit in their chairs and engage in conversation and kind of learn what was going on and also use that time to brief them on what I'd heard what was going to be happening on the floor that day. I was always on the lookout for late night sessions or all night sessions or filibusters or other things. So, it became a process where I could help, because they were tied to the desk all day in rotation.

It also gave me a chance to sit next to Bob Dove and Alan Frumin and Kevin Kayes and learn parliamentary procedure. I really took it almost as my school time to be on the floor. I love being on the floor. Again, there wasn't a lot for me to do but it was just such an educational experience and to be there where so much history had occurred.

RITCHIE: In a sense, what all of those clerks do today is what the first Secretary of the Senate did: calling the roll, taking the minutes and things like that. How directly do they work for the Secretary of the Senate? Are they the charge of the Secretary of the Senate or are they independent operatives who are associated with the Secretary?

JOHNSTON: I think it depends on the Secretary. So much of what happens in the Senate depends on your relationship with your principal. For the Secretary, his role is defined largely by his or her relationship with the Majority Leader. That's been true of Frank Valeo who was once and always the foreign policy expert for Senator [Mike] Mansfield. My relationship with Senator Dole was somewhat distant because he was busy running for president at the very time he hired me. I rarely saw him. He also made it clear to me that he wanted me to run the Senate, do my job, and not cause him any problem. He gave me a lot of leeway but also held me accountable for it. Most of our communication was by memo because he was never around and never available. I had pretty much a free rein and a long rope under Senator Dole's jurisdiction.

Senator Lott's jurisdiction was much the same although I communicated with him a great deal because he was learning. He did not know what the Secretary of the Senate did. So our relationship during the four or five months that I worked under his leadership was very different. In fact, I would say I saw Senator Lott a whole lot more in four months than I saw Senator Dole in the year that I worked under his jurisdiction. But in both cases they gave me a lot of room to do my job.

With the staff on the floor, the journal clerk, the parliamentarian, the legislative clerk and his staff, as well as the morning business editor, his staff, and the reporters of debate, all of which come under the Secretary of the Senate, the

relationship was one where I let them do their job. They're professionals. But it was a case where I wanted to know what was going on. I wanted to learn enough about their jobs to know if there needed to be adjustments. We had a major problem in the 104th Congress in terms of the number of hours staff were putting in. We had almost a record number of roll call votes that year and a record number of hours in session. I think it was around 1800 hours or more as I remember and the previous record was like 1200 hours and over 600 roll call votes if I recall correctly over the course of the two years. It was just an incredible number, and the hours were enormous. The staff was tired. I wanted to learn their jobs also to be a backup for them.

It was a case really of doing my managerial oversight to be aware, plugged into what was going on and sensitive to the demands and pressures they were facing. We had one day in particular where we broke the record for the number of roll call votes cast. I think it was thirty or thirty-one votes. It could be more, I'm not sure of the exact number now. I remember spending a lot of time on the floor that day not because I wanted to be there as history was being made, but I wanted to be sure that the staff was holding up okay. I was very worried that if they needed someone to step in and help out, I wanted to be there to help out if necessary. I felt I was prepared enough, in case, to do that but never get in their way.

I also looked for ways to help them do their jobs better. One of the ideas I came up with based on being on the floor and also based on my Policy Committee experience was finding a way for us to make amendments more available to staff as they were introduced. This is one of the big frustrations that staffers have all over the Hill when they're spread out in buildings across the Senate. When a senator lays down an amendment or offers an amendment, people are always scrambling for copies of the language. More often than not, an amendment is laid down by a senator without any prior publication of that amendment. That's not always the case but it happens a great deal, especially if you're trying to make a political point. One of the ideas that we began to pursue based on my being on the floor a large part was having a scanner just off the floor that a page could run the amendment through and it be available either via the internal internet system, I think it's called Webster, the internet site, but at

least to be available for distribution on a moment's notice. Now that's going to be part of the new information system that's now being crafted under my successor's leadership.

One other frustration: we have the bell system. Scott Bates sits in front of this little box with these old buttons and there's about a four to six second delay whenever he pushes a button, for example, to convene a session. As he would punch the button, Strom Thurmond would begin to walk up to the dais or up to the President's desk with the Chaplain. By the time he got to the first step the bell would finally go off. Often times Thurmond would begin to gavel the Senate into session when the bells were still ringing. That's because we have a pretty antiquated system and so it's one of the things we began to look at pretty intently. I was not the first one, by the way, to do this. I think Bill Hildenbrand may have been the first to look into getting an upgraded electronic system. I was always looking for ways while sitting there that they could do their job easier and better. I think they appreciated it. They weren't used to seeing a Secretary that often so we were able to build some personal relationships as a result of that.

RITCHIE: Did you have any personnel problems at all on that?

JOHNSTON: None whatsoever. There were occasional complaints that somebody wasn't doing their load here and there, but it was pretty rare. I may have mentioned this in our previous interviews, but as part of professionalizing the Senate we did a study. We had an outside group come in with Senator [Mark] Hatfield's blessing to analyze the salary structure of the Secretary of the Senate's office to create real market-based salary levels. I have discovered now, being in the private sector for a few weeks, that that's been pretty pervasive in the private sector. We tried to tie salaries more to the market.

It's hard to put a market salary on a Senate position because the jobs and the institution are so unique. We felt it was important to do that and, frankly, because of the seniority the floor staff had, their salaries were pretty well above the market ranges that the group had then set. That caused some morale problems for me. It was my own doing. I don't regret doing it because I think it was important to establish market salaries and to try to get some control as we

looked at trying to regulate the costs of the Senate and implement all these new labor laws. We had to do it to establish some sort of a professionalized personnel system that has to take into account all these new federal laws. It had to be done. The staff are madly in love with the Senate. They would rather die than cause any harm to the institution. I have great respect for them and they've given their lives and their careers to this institution. They're not here for the money, so I was more than happy to stay out of their way. I have great respect for them. I let them know I had respect for them and really learned more out of interest and fascination and respect for their duties.

RITCHIE: My sense is that the problem previous Secretaries encountered was that some of the people at the desks were too senior. They had been there so long they just couldn't bring themselves to leave despite having passed their ability to do the job fully. There was one executive clerk who was years behind apparently in producing the Executive Journal. Now most of those issues seem to have been resolved.

JOHNSTON: That's true. I've heard that story. It was the Journal and Bill Lackey who is the current Journal Clerk and has been here, I think, thirty-four years, mentioned that story to me. You have Bill Lackey's thirty-four years, you've got Bob Dove's thirty-five years, Scott Bates's twenty or twenty-one years. There is a lot of seniority there, but Bill Lackey for all his seniority and age--he's not that old--is very high tech and very computer oriented. So I didn't see any problems. There were no personnel problems at all; it's just an absolutely professional staff.

RITCHIE: It's interesting, given that they have to put in very long and irregular hours, how dedicated they are. You have people who kept those jobs for twenty or thirty years and who are obviously loyal to the institution, regardless of what the institution puts them through.

JOHNSTON: I would often times go to the floor during slow periods, because if they are sitting there through quorum call after quorum call on a day in which there are no votes and nothing going on, it can get real boring. It was a great way to go on the floor and sit there or stand there and really talk and

digest some things. I would save up questions that I had for Bob Dove or the other parliamentarians. It was a good chance to ask a question or two.

I also used to talk to the presiding officer a lot, especially if it was Senator Kyl or Senator Inhofe or senators I'd worked for and known personally. It was a great opportunity. They can get very bored sitting up in the chair. It was a nice way to kind of swap stories with some of them. Senator [Hank] Brown was especially humorous. He would engage in a lot of stories and razz his colleagues from the desk and tell stories about them. He was a lot of fun to be around when he was sitting in the chair. You really get to see the personalities develop.

A lot of people don't realize that, especially during roll call votes, how much business goes on up at the president's dais. When a senator's up there he's a target of a lobby campaign by his colleagues or they deliver messages. Sitting in the Secretary's chair I can overhear a lot of those conversations! I picked up a lot of things I otherwise would not have learned. Being on the floor, especially during a roll call vote or during a busy time, was a wonderful way to really keep up with what was happening, what was going on, who's doing what, and what bills were coming down the pike. You also learn about the relationships senators had with each other, which is a very important part of doing this job. If you knew which senators were close or which ones were not close, it could really help you walk the mine field the Senate sometimes can be.

RITCHIE: You mentioned that sometimes during roll call votes senators that you were working on projects with would come up to you to discuss things. What kind of projects would senators want the Secretary to do?

JOHNSTON: One issue that sticks out in my mind that I worked with Senator Conrad Burns on was the U.S. group of the Interparliamentary Union. The Secretary in odd-numbered Congresses is the executive secretary of the U.S. group of this international organization the U.S. helped found in 1889. Senator Burns was the Senate co-chair of the group in the 104th Congress. One of the major issues we had was Senator [Jesse] Helms and some House members wanted the United States to stop funding and pull its membership out of the organization. Senator Burns and Senator Dole felt that we should remain active,

remain engaged even if we had not been able to send anybody to their meetings for seven years. That's where I would talk with Senator Burns about what I discovered and work behind the scenes to get language developed.

I mentioned in a previous interview about the Lobby Disclosure Act. The fact that I was on the floor when a question came about, "Do you mind being the person in charge of administering the Act?" If I had not been on the floor that might not have happened. It just happened that somebody thought of the idea. I just happened to be there, and boom, it got worked out there on the spot. That's where being on the floor could really be an advantage.

Senator Craig Thomas comes to mind, who during kind of the 104th Congress and his first two years in office would see me there and take the opportunity to ask a basic question about procedure and what was going to happen. Senators would come and ask me about the schedule when they saw that Elizabeth Greene or Bob Dole or somebody else was too tied up on the floor. They would say, "Well have you heard what's going to be going on later today? When's the last vote going to happen?" They were trying to catch a plane out of town. Senator Thurmond would look at me and say, "Can you get somebody to sit up here in my chair?" So I was really kind of backstopping a lot of people and just being there to be an extra hand and be helpful in any way I could.

I also used these occasions to keep up my relationships with key staff people, especially on the Republican side. I made a point of sitting in the staff sections on occasion to chat with the staff, and to learn about their problems, and to hear what was going on in their areas of expertise. Again, it was a great way to keep in contact with things. The one thing I really was concerned about as Secretary was losing touch of the policy issues and the real legislative work of the Senate, because the job is pretty much administrative and procedural. So, I would use my time on the floor just to keep in touch, share ideas mostly with Republican staff, but also to build relationships. It was invaluable to me to do that.

RITCHIE: Did you get senators coming up with gripes as well?

JOHNSTON: Yes. [laughing] Fortunately, they were gripes that I had no jurisdiction over. One senator, who will go unnamed, was constantly complaining about not having a hideaway office in the Capitol. It was one of the new members and it was a constant, "When

am I going to get my hideaway?" Gripes about that, gripes about the schedule. Sometimes during a lot of long days, Senator Dole, especially during the government shutdown period, kept the Senate in session on weekends, late nights, whatever it took. Somebody had to be in the chair, and I'd get the occasional gripe, "Why are we here doing this? I could be somewhere else. This is not very much fun." But really the gripes are pretty rare. Most of the gripes they had they dealt more with things that would be under the jurisdiction of Elizabeth Greene or Marty Paone or the Sergeant at Arms.

RITCHIE: Or the Rules Committee, I suppose.

JOHNSTON: Or the Rules Committee, exactly.

RITCHIE: Some of your predecessors as Secretary would use the Secretary's office as a watering hole, as a place where senators could go and kick their shoes off and have informal meetings or just get away from the glare. Did senators use the Secretary's office when you were there?

JOHNSTON: I tried to encourage that. One of the ways the Senate has changed, from what I heard under the previous Secretaries, was that it used to be customary around four or five o'clock in the afternoon for senators to go to the Secretary's office, open up the liquor cabinet and have a few beverages. During my time we had a liquor cabinet in my office. I didn't know what to do with it. Not one senator during my time came in there looking for a beverage. I think I can count the number of beers I served on one hand to visitors--not senators, by the way--who came in to see me. I made it clear that it was available but nobody took me up on it. Those days are gone. The senators just don't drink anymore, at least like they used to or at least not in a public way or even in the Capitol.

I did make a practice of making my office available to senators for meetings. I know Senator Nickles was a prolific user of the office as was Senator Kyl, Senator DeWine; the North Dakota senators, [Kent] Conrad and [Byron] Dorgan used it. Senator Mack used to use it. Senator Cochran would do media interviews in my office quite a bit. I was always thrilled to see it used, although I was warned that I shouldn't do that because I would probably lose it. It just so happens that that office now is going to, I think, go to Senator Nickles as the Assistant Majority Leader. I'm delighted that that's going to happen. Yes, I made a practice of

opening up my office. I made it very clear to both Democrats and Republican that, especially during times when there were stacked roll call votes, which was frequent in the 104th Congress, that if they had to move meetings and they needed a room to meet to feel free to use my office for that purpose. It was used a great deal for that purpose, quite often.

RITCHIE: And also the LBJ Room [S-211] across the hall was an extension of your office, wasn't it?

JOHNSTON: The LBJ Room was also under the jurisdiction of the Secretary. It's used a great deal, mostly for receptions. I used it a lot not so much for meetings but I would say that Senator Daschle and Senator Dole used it a great deal, and they had priority use of the room. We would bump people if Senator Dole or Daschle needed to use the room. They had first dibs on it. It was their room. Senator Daschle, in particular, took a lot of interest in the decor of that room. It was called the LBJ Room but it had no portrait or picture of LBJ. So Senator Daschle, working with his leadership staff, Jeri Thomson, former number two person in the Secretary's office, obtained an attractive photograph--a photoportrait, I guess is the correct phrase--from the University of Texas at Austin's LBJ Library. They went to great effort to bring it up there. It's rather large and we had a little ceremony to unveil it. Senator Daschle was there and Senator [Charles] Robb and Mrs. Robb, the daughter of LBJ was there.

I heard secondhand that Senator [Daniel Patrick] Moynihan, who is quite the architectural expert, took great offense that there was this photoportrait in this room with these gorgeous historical oil paintings of [John] Adams and [Thomas] Jefferson. Finally, I think it apparently got to Senator Daschle and he decided to swap it out and now there's a Norman Rockwell portrait, a very attractive one, that they've obtained to replace it. They brought in a piece of artwork because

it really didn't fit in the room very well. It was a 1950s era photo just didn't blend with the room's decor. I think Senator Daschle got the message loud and clear from his colleagues. That's just one of those little issues that we got involved in, dealt with more by the Curator of Art, but still something we were very sensitive to.

RITCHIE: That room did seem busy all the time. It seemed like there was always a meeting going on, staff meetings and others.

JOHNSTON: The room is used for the minority party's weekly caucus lunch. Now, of course, the Democrats have it in the 105th as well as the 104th Congress. I went to my first Policy lunch in that room during the 102nd Congress when I was at the Policy Committee. It's used sometimes for press conferences. I occasionally would get a frantic call from a press Secretary saying, "Can Senator Lugar use the room for a press conference?" We didn't like having it for press conferences because the press can be pretty rough on a room when they walk into it. The cameras scuff up the walls and things. Joe Stewart, when he was Secretary, went to great expense to restore that room. It's a beautiful historic room but it is used a lot--I would say, on average, at least one and sometimes three or four times a day.

RITCHIE: Didn't the Republican staff directors meet over there?

JOHNSTON: On occasion. They go back and forth between S. 207 and S. 211 depending on what's available. It's funny, S. 207, which is under the Majority Leader's jurisdiction is the most sought after room in the Senate for Senate meetings and receptions. It's a gorgeous room and it's large. S. 211 is probably a close second. Usually if S. 207 is occupied S. 211 is next in line so it was kind of the back up room for S. 207 if it was occupied. There was a time when Dole put a blanket reservation on S. 207 to be available to him at all times. So S. 211 became very popular to use for a period of the time there during Senator Dole's leadership.

RITCHIE: I can remember going through the halls and seeing people pour out of that room with their yellow legal pads and notes. They'd obviously been drawing up something.

JOHNSTON: The Democrats, Senator Daschle and the Democrat Policy Committee staff, use that room a great deal. I, of course, was not invited to those meetings, but they were used a lot by them and I would sometimes peek out my back door--in S. 210--and see all the leftover papers that came out of the room. That way I'd keep up on what the Democratic Policy Committee was doing! [laughs] It's very handy because they would store the extra papers there right outside my door.

RITCHIE: The Secretary of the Senate is the host for all sorts of things that are going on.

JOHNSTON: Yes, I hosted a lot. We had a lot of visiting delegations from different countries. The Congressional Research Service of the Library of Congress has a program where they bring over members of parliaments and key parliamentary staff from emerging democracies, especially countries that were developing legislative systems for the first time in their histories or for many years. I made it a practice to try to meet with those groups when they came. I'd gotten the impression under previous Secretaries that they were kind of shrugged off as a nuisance and it was very hard for them to see senators. I know how I would feel if I was in a situation, having been to several countries to IPU meetings in Romania and Estonia and really having a fascination with their governmental histories, I wanted to build relationships with those countries. I had delegations come in from Russia, Romania, England, which was a most interesting session since members of Parliament in England are just great to visit with. They're very entertaining people. A whole host of other countries from around the world visited me. It was just a fascinating and richly rewarding experience to show off the office and have a discourse about how they ran their operation versus ours.

I discovered in the process that the Secretary of the Senate is actually relatively weak compared to what they call "secretaries general" of other

parliaments. I'll give you an example. When I was in Romania in October of 1995, I went to an IPU conference there and met up with my counterpart for the Romanian House of Deputies which is the lower house. He gave me this great tour of their facilities and their chamber. They're nice, not as nice as ours, but they were nice. I asked him how many staff did he have work for him. He said two thousand. I discovered that it's pretty common in these countries that all the staff of the legislature or the parliament report to and work for the Secretary. Individual senators or parliamentarians do not have their own staff. All the staff report to, work for the Secretary and that's not the case, obviously, here.

I remember meeting with a Brazilian senator. A brand new, newly elected Brazilian senator, who asked about staffing and how senators get their work done. I described they have between eighteen and forty staff members that report to them, plus their committee staff. His eyes just lit up. "Oh, to have staff, to have staff!" To discover that I only had around two hundred staff people to them was a rather small amount. We operate differently than most emerging countries. But that's because in the Senate the power really is diffused among senators, where in those emerging democracies you've got the people who run the parliaments and keep a real strong hand, via the secretary general, on the operation.

RITCHIE: Even in the old-line democracies like the British Parliament, members have very little office space or personal staff.

JOHNSTON: I discovered a member of the British Parliament might have one staffer and then one intern.

RITCHIE: And might even share an office with somebody else.

JOHNSTON: They do share an office, in most cases. Unless they are senior or a cabinet official they share an office much like a U.S. state legislature.

RITCHIE: I remember taking the President of the Austrian Parliament through the Capitol. He was most interested in the retirement plan.

JOHNSTON: [Laughs] I did have a lot of questions on retirement plans in the Senate. I got to be pretty knowledgeable about them because they often times would ask especially

from an emerging democracy. "Well, how do you take care of yourself salary wise? How are you paid? What are the retirement plans?" Most of these countries don't have any for their members of parliament. They're not paid well and they don't have retirement plans. That was an area of interest.

RITCHIE: I would have thought that the International Parliamentary Union delegation must have some difficulty when they go to meetings because the U.S. Congress is set up so differently and runs so differently than almost every parliamentary government. It's hard to compare the functions. I suppose for good will purposes it's worthwhile going, but for practical purposes does the delegation gets much out of it?

JOHNSTON: Well, our delegation, the United States was very active in IPU back in the 1980s, during the Cold War period, because the IPU was seen as kind of forum. It was a Cold War forum and there were a lot of propaganda battles between the U.S. and Soviet delegations. So we would have a large delegation. Senator Dole was active, former Congressman Ed Derwinsky was very active, Claude Pepper, former Congressman was very active. Senator Burns is the last senator to have gone to an IPU conference and that was in 1989. It was in his first year and it was the only time he ever missed votes.

That's the problem. IPU conferences are scheduled twice a year and they're always scheduled when we're in session. Senators just don't want to miss votes to go to an international conference. It does not play well back home. Ironically, that's not a big concern for parliamentarians in other parties or other countries. I remember talking to one of the leaders of IPU, a parliamentarian from Iceland who said, "Well, I missed votes to be here. Why can't they?" I said, "Well can you go back and explain to our constituents why it's no big deal to your folks to miss votes to be on foreign travel?" When I began to explain the issue, they began to realize, "Oh, I can see the problem."

One of the things I'm really most proud of--and one of the reasons I went to IPU conferences all by myself with one other staff person and no senator--was to help try to keep the U.S. involved but also to negotiate a change in their schedule, which we successfully did. The next conference will be in South Korea in April of 1997. They moved their conferences to overlap a weekend so we can send a delegation. Now senators or House members can go. I don't know who Senator Lott has appointed to be the IPU chair for this Congress. I hope it's Senator Burns because he'd do a good job. Hopefully, that will get us back involved.

I think there's a great benefit to the U.S. being involved in IPU. This is the time for us to be leaders in the only organization of members of parliaments when there are so many new emerging democracies. They're looking for role models and we are the best role model in the world for them and yet we're not there. It frustrated me that we couldn't participate in that process and secondly, with the increasing globalization of the world's economy, we've *got* to be there. I'll give you an example, copyright issues. You've got something like Microsoft in Washington, which is losing millions of dollars on copyright infringements and piracy of their software products. This is the kind of forum that they need to be at to make their case for international standards on intellectual property. That's just one of many issues.

There's importation of beef issues involving Australia and the United States. And in my new industry, the issue of food safety around the world. And water and environment, these are all big international issues. This is the one forum where members of the world's parliaments gather twice a year to discuss these issues. With the increasing power and prevalence of parliamentary democracies around the world, we're making a big mistake not being involved. I became kind of a one-man lobbyist for our involvement with senators. Frankly, I think the big problem was that we had not been involved for so long that no one was aware of it. That's what led a lot of strength to the effort to abolish our membership in the IPU. I'm really worried about that.

RITCHIE: I was thinking that when you were saying that they didn't like to miss votes--in the past, they would have been able to pair their votes.

JOHNSTON: That's correct.

RITCHIE: But when the Senate dropped pairing they really dropped any way in which a senator could be legitimately absent from a vote without it showing as an absence in the *Record*.

JOHNSTON: That's correct.

RITCHIE: That was one of the unintended consequences, I guess, of that decision.

JOHNSTON: I think that senators remember some of the campaign television commercials they've seen. They all watch each other's commercials very closely. Probably the most devastating set of commercials about missing votes for foreign travel was done by then candidate Frank Lautenberg against Congresswoman Millicent Fenwick in the 1982 Senate race in New Jersey. A lot of empty chair visuals, you know, about how Millicent Fenwick never missed a meeting of a Foreign Relations Committee and was on travel, but when it came to showing up for the education committee votes, she was never there. So, it became tied to local concern expressing care and compassion for local issues and it really hurt her, and probably cost her the election. That one lesson did not bypass a lot of senators or House members about that issue so they are all very careful about that now.

RITCHIE: I remember there was some campaigns, I think when Senator [Joseph] Clark of Pennsylvania ran the first time, he drove around with an empty chair tied to the roof of his car to represent his opponent's voting record. But there really isn't any way to be legitimately excused from voting?

JOHNSTON: No.

RITCHIE: Unless the Senate doesn't happen to be meeting at that particular time. And the Majority can't commit to not holding votes for a week's time because business builds up.

JOHNSTON: That's right.

RITCHIE: And the Secretary of the Senate is still responsible for international travel? That's one of the offices.

JOHNSTON: For leadership-sponsored Codels--Codel being the acronym for congressional delegations overseas--there really are basically two kinds of trips. Those that are authorized by committees and paid for by their budgets in which the Secretary has very little involvement. Sometimes the Interparliamentary Services staff would help do the staffing or provide some assistance for those committee-authorized trips. Then there are the leadership authorized trips, those that Senator Lott and Senator Daschle now authorize. Those are the ones the Secretary by custom along with the Sergeant at Arms and all the officers are pretty much sort of automatically invited to go if they want. I made a practice of trying to go where possible because Joe Stewart had advised me, and he was absolutely correct, that that is the *best* way to build relationships with senators. If you're travelling with them, you really get to know them really well. I found that to be true.

The last Codel I did, was one in May to Alaska. It was a U.S.-Canadian parliamentary conference and I built great relationships with Senator Rod Grams, Senator Mack and some House members that were also on the trip. It's a really wonderful way to learn and build a relationship. One of the frustrations I had was that a lot of the Republican members in particular, because they didn't know the Secretary and didn't know what he did, didn't know what to do with me while I was there. So it was a great chance for me to educate them about what I did, and how I could be helpful to them, and help make their lives easier in Washington, as well as help their staffs. I found they really appreciated that and often times began to call a lot more. I got the impression that most, at least the Republican senators, had no clue what the Secretary did so those trips are also a chance to build educational things. I also got to really build some wonderful friendships with Senator Pryor, whom I just loved. He was a great travelling companion as were many others. I travelled, as well, with Senator [William] Roth for North Atlantic Assembly meetings. I got to know Senator Slade Gorton and

his wife who is just a delight. So, really, getting to know the spouses is pretty important too.

The Secretary sort of has a role there with spouses because the Senate spouses have a little group that meets for lunch about the same time as senators have Policy lunch together. They each have a Senate Wives' Club, and they elect a chairwoman or chairman, a chairwoman, obviously, in most cases. Senator Hollings' wife, Petsie Hollings and Senator Burns' wife, Phyllis, were very prominent during my time there. In fact, I came and spoke to the wives once about what was going on in the Secretary's office. I was kind of an official liaison to them and tried to help them with their needs. It built on my campaign experience because when I involved in political campaigns, the spouse was always kind of the odd person out. Campaigns hated to deal with them, didn't know what to do with them. Spouses felt they were losing their husbands and wives to campaigns and losing control of the schedule and it was a cause of all sorts of friction.

I made a very strong point of building, or trying to build a good relationship with the spouses to let them know they had a place to go, to be helpful to them and as a result built some pretty good relationships. In fact, on some of the trips, spouses were with the senators when it was appropriate and there was no additional cost to the government. So, often times we would do special trips or special side excursions just for the spouses to give them something to do. I would go with them on occasion versus staying with the senators, to help coordinate with them and give them extra little attention and to build a relationship with them.

RITCHIE: I was going to ask you what your role would be on a trip like this. Would you be making the arrangements? Would you be in charge of anything?

JOHNSTON: Well, my staff was responsible for the arrangements so I had some responsibility, although, frankly, I did not have to do a great deal. The IPS staff, now led by Sally Walsh, was just extraordinarily good. They had done a lot of work here, they knew the senators, they knew the embassies, they really

"knew the drill" on how to do a trip. Also the military liaisons were very instrumental in helping to staff and coordinate it. We always, for any official trips, got Air Force planes, the 80th Wing out at Andrews. We'd always use one of their planes to fly the members over. They did the lion's share of the work and our staff did the rest, interfacing with the embassy staff on the ground wherever we were going. So, my job was just to make sure things were going fine.

On occasion there would be a role to play. For example, we had plane problems once coming back from the Canadian trip. We had to stop in this little isolated outpost in British Columbia. It was a planned stop but our engine couldn't get started very well and so I had some nervous senators, "Well, what's wrong with the plane?" That's when you get to test your skills to keep people calm, and to learn what's going on, and keep the senators and spouses out of the hair of the guys trying to run the plane. It was an interfacing role in that way. And just to be an extra hand and an extra staffer if needed and just to be an extra set of hands and eyes and ears for all the activities.

RITCHIE: I was going to ask you if you had encountered any crises. I suppose plane problems would be a crisis.

JOHNSTON: There were never any crises. I was always worried about crises, more worried about somebody missing a bus or somebody going off and doing something ridiculous. I would have to say the senators that I travelled with were very well behaved travelers, and their spouses were too. Most of the senators who do that kind of travel do it a great deal. They have done quite a bit and so they know what to do, and they don't take any foolish risks. There was never any close to a crisis during the three or four trips I took with senators overseas.

RITCHIE: I suppose when you're in another country then the U.S. embassy staff does a lot of the. . .

JOHNSTON: They do the leg work. They're the guides, they're the interpreters, they were very, very helpful and are very good by the way. I

remember even when I was travelling on my own to an IPU conference in Turkey, the chargé d'affaires of the Istanbul office came out to greet me at the airport, and made sure I was well taken care of, and got me to my hotel. They were just excellent for both members as well as for me when I was on travel.

RITCHIE: Right after World War II, congressional delegations could travel on what they called "counterpart money." It was money from currency exchanges that just stockpiled. They would pick up the counterpart and use that for expenses. Who pays for the current delegate? How do you account for everything that goes on on a trip?

JOHNSTON: Well, there is a revolving account but I don't know the details that well. All I know is that there are budgets for travel the leadership gets to authorize. That doesn't come out of the senator's account, it comes out of a budget for this purpose, and it's all published in the *Congressional Record*. In addition, the IPS people have a revolving account for covering those kinds of travel. Often times that's money that was unspent that was set aside for these purposes. Whenever I traveled, for example, my travel was always on the revolving account if I was going on my own, which I did twice, once to Romania and once to Turkey, both for IPU conferences. Pretty much the days of doing it with the extra money are gone, obviously. Everything is very well accounted for and very well publicized now.

RITCHIE: Previous Majority Leaders used foreign travel as ways of currying favor with senators--in other words, to help out a friend, to return a favor for a vote. They would put senators on appropriate overseas delegations going to places they thought they'd like to go. Is that still a practice at all?

JOHNSTON: No, because most senators don't do much overseas travel. Now the practice is--I'll give you an example--Senator Roth, who chairs the Senate delegation to the North Atlantic Assembly. The practice is for the senator to invite any of his colleagues to go to apply. Because it's so hard now to get senators to go on these trips, anybody who wants to go can. I know in Senator Roth's case, we had between six and eight senators who would go.

The biggest delegation I think we've had in recent years was the most recent U.S.-Canada Interparliamentary Conference. There are three countries that we do interparliamentary conferences with, Canada, Britain, Mexico. Those three bilateral

conferences are the most active international things that we do in the Senate. Senator [Frank] Murkowski had arranged for a fabulous educational experience aboard an Alaskan ferry. We had the conference on a ferry going up the Sound from Prince Rupert, British Columbia all the way up to Skagway and then took a train up to Whitehorse in the Northwest territories. It was a stunning experience and it was Senator Murkowski's way of really introducing and educating the Canadians and the Americans who were there from Congress about Alaskan issues and seeing the beauty of Alaska. It was a wonderful educational experience, and we had a large number of senators and House members on that ferry. I think there were fourteen members that went on this trip, which is high for us. It was a case where he made a pitch for all the senators to go and anybody who wanted to go could. The days of doing them as a favor are gone now. It's anybody who wants to go can because so few do.

RITCHIE: Now it's not because of missing votes in that case, it's just they don't want . . .

JOHNSTON: The appearance of travelling. Because again there's been a splurge of commercials in recent years about international travel. It's common practice now for a candidate who's running against an incumbent who does travel to do this commercial of exotic places, even if they're not that exotic. Then it appears they are vacationing at taxpayers expense while the real work back home is not being done. So senators are really very cautious now about doing those kind of travels. It's sometimes easier to go to a less exotic place than it is to go to an exotic place than it used to be.

RITCHIE: It's a shame because you want legislators to know what the problems of the world are.

JOHNSTON: You're right. And I'm one of those people, in campaign days, who used to love to do attacks on incumbents that did international travel. Now having done it, I see the enormous benefit of being in a culture, and

learning the issues, and building the relationships, and really being an advocate for U.S. industry. There have been recent stories in the press about how U.S. embassies have become almost advocates for international business. Ambassadors are going to McDonalds for the launching of the new franchise. Members of Congress can play that role, be very strong advocates on trade missions, for their colleagues.

The biggest growth, frankly, in international travel by members has been with private organizations. There is one organization that the Secretary of the Senate has actually had a role in recent years and that's with the Asia-Pacific Exchange Foundation. It's a wonderful organization. I was chairman of the Senate advisory committee. It's organizations like that, non-profit, non-partisan organizations who are privately funded usually by corporations who do business in these countries, who are a vehicle for members to travel overseas. For members who wanted to do private versus public funded trips which are not disclosed to the degree a public trip is, who wanted the flexibility of *not* dealing with the embassy and getting away from the official travel, who didn't mind flying commercial versus flying in the nice C137s going overseas, they're a great vehicle. I know there are members of the House who will not travel at taxpayer expense but routinely use organizations like this. There are lots of others who do "overseas travel" and do the things they really need to do but don't want to do it at taxpayer expense because of the perception problems.

RITCHIE: Almost anything a member of Congress does can be portrayed in a negative sense in a campaign.

JOHNSTON: Yes, and is!

RITCHIE: Which is too bad, since there are a lot of parts of the job that they ought to be doing and that they may shy away from. Travel is clearly one of them. Without the Cold War justifying much of that travelling, it will only be harder to do it in the future.

JOHNSTON: I don't know if I've mentioned this already but one of the missions I took on myself as Secretary was public relations. There is no

communication director for the Senate as an institution. The institution clearly in the last twenty years has been beat up royally. Nobody really defends the institution. There's no political benefit to saying, "I'm for the institution of the Senate." So, I took it upon myself to be an educator and a public relations officer for the institution. I made it a point of being more visible, I think, than any of my predecessors, at some risk, by the way, because the tradition for Secretaries is really to be behind the scenes and somewhat anonymous if you will. I chose a different tact.

The Secretary has an obligation and a responsibility to educate the public about the history and the significance of the U.S. Senate. I took it upon myself to be an ambassador for the Senate. I sought out interviews with the press. I sought out opportunities to speak before groups and educate the public about the Senate, to participate in model senates and model organizations that were designed to emulate and show what it's like to be in the U.S. Senate. I tried to build a better bond between the institution and the people. I didn't get very far, obviously, because I wasn't there that long but I will say that being on C-SPAN to give a tour of my office, one of the first things I did, and giving tours of various rooms which C-SPAN uses to fill in time, was incredibly valuable, I think, in terms of trying to educate. It even gave the C-SPAN people more of an appreciation of the institution. By doing that to the people who provide information to the public you also do it for the public as well. That's the other thing I was most proud of and I hope that that's continued by my successors.

RITCHIE: Did you have any connection with all these programs, the Close Up and Presidential Scholarship programs?

JOHNSTON: Yes, I talked to all of them. I sought them out. Every opportunity I had to speak to a group about the Senate, especially young groups of high school students, the Close Up program, the Hearst Foundation and others I took. Any time they did a program of students coming in town, I always spoke to them if invited, and would seek them out if possible.

RITCHIE: Those have grown enormously. I understand there were four thousand Close Up students here during the recent Inauguration, and in April

there will be even more. Senator Mary Landrieu of Louisiana is our first Close Up student to be elected to the U.S. Senate.

JOHNSTON: I didn't realize that. How about that.

RITCHIE: Her first trip to Washington was as a Close Up student.

JOHNSTON: That's a great story.

RITCHIE: And there will be more I'm sure.

JOHNSTON: I'm sure.

RITCHIE: Because many of the kids who come are politically interested, and this is their opportunity to see how the system really works. But, you're right, the Senate is a group of individuals and a collective institution that has a hard time presenting a picture of what it does.

JOHNSTON: Well, I really made a point of educating. Any chance I could whether it was Congressional Accountability Act and how we're complying, how the Lobby Disclosure Act was going to clean up perceptions of lobbying, to do tours of rooms of the Capitol with colorful histories, I did it. Anything I could do to educate the public. The Web site is another one. One of the things I'm also very proud of was Senator [John] Warner and I going to the Press Gallery. It was the one press conference I did in the Senate Press Gallery with a U.S. Senator to unveil the web site. That's been a wonderful thing to be involved in, and to use, as a way to provide virtual tours of the Capitol.

Another area that I took great interest in--in fact, Dick Baker deserves a lot credit for this--was the report that we gave to the Rules Committee and the Appropriations Committee on the visitor's experience in the Capitol. Dick Baker and Diane Skvarla did a magnificent job, starting before I began and continuing on, to try to focus on the educational experience of visitors and just how badly we treat visitors here. I will say that you get better treatment as a visitor to the Romanian Senate than you do to the U.S. Senate. That's really embarrassing. So,

one of the things I championed and I think this will be picked up, Senator Warner and I talked about the report that we filed and he agreed with all the points. I think in the next few months you'll see commissions and boards established to try to focus on the treatment of visitors in the Capitol and expand their experience. We have four million people that walk into that building every year and we don't treat them well.

One thing that I began to explore was setting up little transmitters in key rooms and allowing visitors to rent a little box they can carry with them and in twelve languages hear about the history of the room. We were guessing between thirty and forty percent of our visitors come from other countries based on the experience of other monuments and sights in the D.C. area. So, we're not just educating Americans, we're educating the world about the institution and we've got to do a better job. I think we've at least got their attention. So I think you'll see some progress in that area.

RITCHIE: Perhaps now the new Architect of the Capitol will start work on the Visitor's Center.

JOHNSTON: Oh, I can't wait. Well, the Capitol Preservation Commission needs to be activated again. They didn't meet once during my tenure and I'm embarrassed by that. I'm hoping to be put on the advisory committee to get that process going. Through coin sales they've already raised twenty-seven or twenty-eight million which is a nice down payment on getting that Visitor Center done. It's going to cost about a hundred million dollars to complete. The plans are a little opulent but they're good. It's a good functioning center and it needs to be done. I think now with the elections passed, you've got a very good chairman of the Rules Committee in Senator Warner. Senator [Wendell] Ford has a longtime interest in this area. I think you're going to see a lot of bipartisan effort.

If I were a little angel on the shoulders of Newt Gingrich, I'd say here's one way to kind of rehabilitate your image is to focus on the institution and try to preserve it and open it up. It's a natural for him because he's a teacher, a professor. We're talking about educating the world about the institution. What

better time, what better place, what better person to be involved in that in a bipartisan way? I'm going to try to deliver that message.

RITCHIE: What has to be done is to make it look like a public educational tool as opposed to Congress spending money on itself.

JOHNSTON: Absolutely.

RITCHIE: Otherwise it could be sunk by the press: "Well, here is Congress spending a hundred million on itself."

JOHNSTON: I would say that if we do it right with the press there is no way they could write that story because none of this is going to benefit the members per se. It's going to benefit the institution and educate the public. It's all being done for visitors. It's not being done for members. There's not any way members can benefit personally from that kind of a project, except an information center where information about where they are and what there name is and the biographical history which anybody can get by signing onto the internet now. They don't have to go to the Visitor's Center, they can do it now. I think the press that works in this building will agree that we don't treat visitors well. I've talked to press about this. I think they agree with that.

RITCHIE: The visitors really don't understand the legislative process.

JOHNSTON: They don't.

RITCHIE: They barely understand the difference between the Senate and the House chambers, and they may see one and not the other. Or they may walk in the chamber in the middle of a quorum call and have no idea why nothing is happening. They really don't get any legislative preparation as they come in.

JOHNSTON: One thing I was also proud of was working with our gift shop director. We got a call from an author, Cheryl Barnes who's husband Peter Barnes is an anchor for CNBC in the morning. They write children's books together. They wrote a children's book entitled *Woodrow the White House Mouse*.

They gave me a copy because they were pondering doing a book about the Congress. Ernie LePire was the one that said, "If you're going to do one about the White House, you've got to do the Congress." They came up with *The Squeaker of the House and the Senate Mouse-Jority Leader*. It was a wonderful educational book about the process. They took a bill about cheese and walked it through in kindergarten language and with wonderful visuals. We walked them onto the floor of the Senate when we were not in session one day and took them back to some of the rooms and now we sell the book in the gift shop. It's a wonderful educational tool for kids. I wanted to expand, create and support efforts to educate on the process all the way down to five year olds. Having a seven year old myself, I probably have more appreciation of that than most people.

RITCHIE: Well, you mentioned the gift shop and that was another public outreach. While you were Secretary you actually established a gift shop in the Capitol building.

JOHNSTON: The decision to do that was done by Sheila Burke and it was not without some controversy. The Capitol Historical Society vehemently objected to that. One of my big regrets is the very hostile relationship I had and still have with the Historical Society. The Capitol Historical Society, unbeknownst to most, frankly, is our only--and a very failed--experiment in privatization. Going back to the 1960s, they were the only outside organization given a franchise in the Capitol building. They were supposed to create a Capitol Visitor's Center. What it turned into was a little store to sell gifts. They were overpriced, cheap and often times done without the permission or approval or the attention of the Senate. They don't give out anything for free.

We set up the gift shop annex in the Capitol specifically to do what the Historical Society was supposed to do and never did. We give out free materials. We'd give out free publications on the Senate and the chamber and other aspects of the building plus we sell items that they don't sell at a better value. Again, that's an educational outreach to visitors. It's not done for the profit. We make a little bit of money on it, which all helps to defray the cost of operating it, but it's done as a public service. It was there I learned about the Historical Society--

it is a failed experiment. One of the things that we need to do is revisit the relationship with the Historical Society. That will be done as part of the process of the new visitor's center just because it needs to be done.

RITCHIE: That's the gift shop is right by the visitor's entrance, by the visitor's desk?

JOHNSTON: That's correct.

RITCHIE: Previously, the Senate stationery store, which is under the Secretary of the Senate, used to carry gifts but only senators and Senate staff could go in. After the House encountered such trouble as Dan Rostenkowski misusing their gift store, gift items were removed from the Senate stationery store practically over night.

JOHNSTON: That's right.

RITCHIE: And a separate gift shop was set up in a pretty obscure part of the Russell Building.

JOHNSTON: It's open to the public, and you can't purchase anything there with official dollars. In fact, I've done all my Christmas shopping there in the last two years. It's a wonderful resource and they sell really good items. One of the issues I know will get the attention of the Congress eventually is why does the Senate operate at taxpayer expense to some degree a retail operation. Well, the reason we do that is to protect the Senate. If you're going to sell items that are designed to depict the U.S. Senate, and the history of the Senate in official symbols of the U.S. Senate, you need to do it with a lot of protection. I don't think you can really privatize that. In addition, we're not doing it to give somebody a franchise to make money, we're doing it primarily as a service to the public to educate them. As big a fan of privatization as I am, this is one example where I strongly oppose it. They should probably raise their prices a little bit and cover all the costs of operating so it doesn't appear as if we're subsidizing the gift business. On the other hand, it's important to mention its mission to educate the public about the history of the Senate.

RITCHIE: Well, certainly the gift store in the Capitol Building is much more accessible than the one in the Russell Building. Even though the one in the Russell is open to the public, it's hard to find.

JOHNSTON: Well, there's less traffic over there.

RITCHIE: The one in the Capitol is one that people just wandering in the building can encounter and it has a nice array of books as well as artifacts.

JOHNSTON: Yes it does. I think they do a good job.

RITCHIE: On the other hand, nothing is done without some bloodshed.

JOHNSTON: I'll tell you, anytime you do anything involving real estate in the Capitol you are walking into a hornets nest, because real estate is such a premium in the Capitol Building. In addition with something where you sell items in the Capitol, it's a very touchy issue. It took a lot of work on Sheila Burke's part. I think it may even have been Joe Stewart's idea to do it originally. It took a while for it to finally come to fruition and I remember being the one that signed the document approving the final plan for it several days into my term in office as Secretary.

RITCHIE: It's something of a testament to the institution that the Senate never had a bank scandal, never had a post office scandal, never had a gift shop scandal, the way the House did. All of those institution were in some degree in existence here but managed to come through with clean books and without anything that anyone could bring charges against.

JOHNSTON: That's right and that is testimony to the fact the Senate operates in a bipartisan basis. There's bipartisan management of the Senate, and that has served the institution very well and I think the House has gotten the message. I was over on the House side during all of this stuff and it's possible in this business to try to do too much for your colleagues. Clearly, the Secretary, the Sergeant at Arms and all the staff in the Senate infrastructure do whatever they can to make life easier for senators. The same is true on the House side but

you can go too far. The House bank scandal, the post office scandal is testimony to that so you have to be really, really vigilant and remember that who you work for is not so much the members, it's the institution; you've got to protect it.

A lesson that Joe Stewart taught me well is: you are the chief protector of the institution. If sometimes you've got to be a bad guy, you've got to be a bad guy, even saying no to senators sometimes when it's in the interest of the institution. I'm sure that Joe has talked about this with you but there was an effort one time by several newly-elected members who came over from the House to create a Senate bank like the House bank. It was Joe Stewart among others who said, "No way." That took some courage on Joe's part to do that. I mean it's not easy to say no to U.S. senators and sometimes there's a price to pay for that. But Joe did the right thing because Joe was protecting the institution. I learned a valuable lesson from Joe.

RITCHIE: You have to remember there's always going to be public accountability at the end.

JOHNSTON: Absolutely, and we owe Joe a debt of gratitude. Joe deserves a lot of thanks for it, a lot of praise.

RITCHIE: This has been very interesting. We've gotten a wide-range of the types of services that the Secretary provides, including protecting the Senate from the senators sometimes.

JOHNSTON: Sometimes you've got to do that.

[End of the fourth interview]