

## SECRETARY FOR THE MAJORITY

Interview #3

Monday, September 9, 2002

**KIMMITT:** When I was watching the [Walter] Mondale speech the other night in the Leaders' Lecture series, [Trent] Lott, [Tom] Daschle, and Mondale all mentioned the "historic" move when the Vice President moved from the Old Executive Office Building to the West Wing of the White House. It occurred to me that I knew exactly how and when that happened, but to refresh my memory I called my son Bob the other evening. Here is generally what he remembers—and his memory is far sharper than mine:

"In November of 1977 I was living at 6004 Copely, which is our home with you and Mom, while in my third year of law school and concurrently my first year as a member of the National Security Council staff." (Later he became executive secretary of the National Security Council.) "The Thursday or Friday after the presidential election, I arrived home as usual around 7:00 p.m. and came back to your bedroom." (That's where Eunice, my wife, and I usually sit and watch television). "You got a call soon thereafter from Vice President-elect Mondale. He mentioned that he was leaving the next day to meet with President-elect Carter on an island off the coast of Georgia and asked if you had any suggestions. You responded that you did not, but your son who worked at the White House and whose office was actually in the Old Executive Office Building across West Executive Avenue was with you and you asked me if I had any advice. I responded that the Vice President would only really be in the full rhythm of the White House if he had an office there, and West Executive Avenue sometimes felt like a chasm between the two buildings. I also noted that then Vice President Rockefeller said that 'being in the OEOB is like being in Baltimore.' You passed these comments on to Senator Mondale, who said it was an excellent point that he would raise with Governor Carter the next day."

So that was the origin, it seems to me. I am sure others wondered and hoped and desired to be in the White House before that, but Mondale took advantage of the moment, which is very important. Here is the new President-elect Jimmy Carter, coming out of Georgia with no Washington experience of any sort, having a team around him who didn't have a great deal of Washington expertise, and who, in fact, made it quite clear that one of his missions was to straighten out Washington. When he arrived in Washington that became very apparent.

I remember going to Blair House with Senator Mansfield and other senators when President-elect Carter was there and he acted almost like a conquering hero. He came down the stairs at a deliberate gait. He gave me the impression, maybe not the others, that this is something he just had to go through with this Washington crowd. And even after that Hamilton Jordan his top man on the liaison and with Frank Moore was working the Hill, and they were not warmly received. You remember that Speaker Tip O'Neill referred to Jordan as "Hannibal Jerkin." There were not good relations initially between the Carter Administration and the Hill. So reverting back to the timing Fritz Mondale was able to present this idea when there was a wide open invitation for new ideas in Washington. I am sure without any further staffing—I am guessing—Carter said "why certainly, that makes sense," and the deal was done.

It did make a great deal of difference. Even though today Vice President [Richard] Cheney is viewed as one of the most influential vice presidents in history, I think Fritz Mondale broke the code on that one, primarily because he was in the White House and in the flow of things. Perception is everything. If the staff perceives a man in an office a block away, and they are in the inner circle geographically, it is entirely natural that they view him as the term is "Auslander," somebody out of the net. So when he came to the White House and established his office there, the staff automatically had to show more deference and pay more attention to him.

As you know, the office of the Vice President over history has been not a terribly important office except for the one constitutional requirement that they would succeed the President in case of death or disability. I remember [Alben] Barkley when he was Vice President. He would spend more than 50 percent of his time presiding over the Senate. Most Vice Presidents of his era and before did that. It was their only constitutional duty. That was all they had to do.

I think [Dwight] Eisenhower broke the pattern when he used [Richard] Nixon, for want of a better term, as a "roving ambassador." Nixon would fulfill the job of White House representation at civic events around the country. Nixon would go overseas for meetings. Nixon would attend funerals of foreign dignitaries and Heads of State. He would attend political gatherings. And that pretty well set the trend for future actions of Vice Presidents.

Now, why this comes to my mind is as Secretary for the Majority, which, as you know, I was for eleven years, one of the most vexing duties we had—and when I say "we," I refer to

Patrick Hynes who was working for me at that time running the [Democratic] Cloakroom—was getting presiding officers for the Senate. Whereas before in the Barkley era, when the Vice President handled that job, this was not a problem. But it became a problem for us. And then, of course, you have the protocol of the President Pro Tem sitting in if the Vice President isn't there. But then the norm became that the President Pro Tem would designate an Acting President Pro Tem to open the proceedings and preside over the proceedings.

During a session there is an absolute requirement that there be a senator in the chair. While I was here we worked on a cooperative and bipartisan basis. We had 68 Democratic senators at that time. We established a procedure in cooperation with Mark Trice, who was Secretary for the Minority, that the Democrats would open the Senate, regardless of the time of day and preside until approximately two o'clock in the afternoon. Then the Republicans would take over and preside between 2:00 and 4:00 or sometimes 5:00. It gave a little flexibility and took some of the pressure off. But finding senators to commit in advance to sit in that chair when they had all of their state responsibilities in their home office, here in the Senate office buildings, when they had their committee responsibilities, their subcommittees and other requirements, speaking at luncheons, breakfasts and so on, was a somewhat vexing problem.

Now we used several gimmicks to help with that. One, if you remember, was the Golden Gavel Award. We started it with Patrick Hynes and I think it was Patrick's idea that the first senator to spend a hundred hours in the chair would win the Golden Gavel. We would have a little ceremony, and it worked well. The other more rational explanation for a senator sitting in the chair was there is no better place to learn the rules by observation and advice from the Parliamentarian, learning other members by faces, desk locations, and their states. They learn procedures, not only the rules, but particularly the legislative procedures of the Senate while presiding over the session. So it was not entirely an unrewarding task they had. It was really an educational task. As a result, normally junior senators fulfilled the duty. Newly elected senators would be called when the Vice President was absent or after the President Pro Tem had delegated the duty. So you would usually get either the President Pro Tem or a senior senator to open the Senate with the Chaplain and initiate the procedures. But then within a relative short period a junior senator would relieve him.

I can think of two first-person episodes that had to do with presiding officers. One was when a serious debate was going on and there were, which is unusual, maybe sixty or seventy

senators on the floor. There was a critical vote coming and the Leader, Senator Mansfield, waved to me to come down and said, "I'd like to get a Democrat in the chair, because of the expected rulings." Well, the presiding officer at that time was a Republican from Connecticut, who left to become its governor.

**RITCHIE:** Weicker?

**KIMMITT:** Lowell Weicker. I went up to him and said, "Senator, Senator so-and-so," possibly [Lee] Metcalf, who as a good parliamentarian, possibly [Joseph] Montoya, who was another one, possibly others, "would be relieving you from the chair." He said, "Why?" Well, I said because the Leader said so, and he got furious. Didn't show it, but as he left the chair he was somewhat seething over this. I think he was anticipating the drama of this very tight vote, too. I am not sure he never forgave me for that. He probably always thought it was my idea.

Another time Senator Mansfield asked me to get a Democrat in the chair and I knew there was no doubt that Dick Russell was the expert on rules of procedure, but you would never ask Senator Russell to take the chair. So as situations developed over months and years, you pretty well identified those who were good. Montoya was good, as I mentioned Lee Metcalf was good and there were others. So this time, unrelated to the Lowell Weicker incident, Senator Mansfield said to get a Democrat and I looked around and I thought, "Well, Lee Metcalf is about as good as the rest." I went over said, "Senator, would you take the chair?" What I didn't realize because of the pressing time and situation, was that Senator Metcalf had a little more of his morning vodka than he should have.

He had a great mind, a great legislator, but he had a penchant for alcohol. I didn't realize this at this time. So he took the chair and the debate went on for a little while. Pretty soon three or four members were on their feet. Some senator, I don't know who, but on the Republican side called for the regular order, which meant, as I remember, that everything should stop and they should go directly to the vote on the bill or amendment. "Regular order, regular order." And Metcalf sort of gazed around a little bit while these senators were still standing. He looked over at the senator calling for regular order and said, "No I want to hear what senator so-and-so has to say." I mean, it was totally out of order, totally out of procedure, which brought the house down. We finally got order and got him out of the chair and put somebody else in there.

But the importance of the presiding officer of the Senate is critical. The third instance, maybe I have told you before, was one of these afternoons when Patrick just couldn't get anybody to preside between 5:00 and 6:00. He finally prevailed upon Senator Danny Brewster of Maryland to take the chair. Brewster apparently told him, "Patrick, I will do it for you, but I have got to be out of that chair by 6:00." He actually was in black tie attire. He had an event to attend. "All right, all right, I will get you out of the chair." Well, Patrick scurried and scurried to get another senator and was unsuccessful. At ten minutes to six, five minutes to six, three minutes to six, still nobody to relieve Brewster.

There weren't many people there. Wayne Morse was speaking. To digress a moment, the staff used to call Wayne Morse the "five o'clock shadow" because he would let the morning business go through, he would let the main legislation proceed, and he would never interfere. But at or near five o'clock he usually had these long, thoughtful speeches. When he spoke, he spoke in more distinct sentences than anyone in the Senate, but he spoke for a long time. Usually his wife would be in the family gallery. He'd be seemingly talking to her. Most of this was all extemporaneous. He had the floor and six o'clock came and 6:01 and 6:02 and finally Brewster just banged the gavel and said, "The Senate is adjourned," got up and walked off.

Well, that left a significant hiatus because only the Majority Leader or his designee can adjourn the Senate. I headed out towards S-207, the Majority Leader's Office, but Mansfield had apparently already heard this on the speaker. This is the first time, probably the only time, I ever saw him run. He came out of his office and was running to the floor. He and Frank Valeo, who was then Secretary of the Senate, huddled and Mansfield vitiated the order. He did something procedurally and then got Wayne Morris back speaking. But for Brewster protocol didn't mean a hell of a lot to him at that time. He had an engagement, a black tie event, he had a promise and like most senators, they live by commitment. So he just adjourned the Senate!

When you have a President Pro Tem, he would not preside long, but he would do his best every day to show up to open the Senate, which is in itself was a ritual. Today, I suppose, Senator Robert C. Byrd seldom spends much time in the chair. Although he does once in awhile. Here again the President Pro Tem picks his spots, just like the Vice President can pick his spots. When there is a vote planned which is expected to be a cliffhanger, whether it ends up being one or not, it is of significant importance to an administration, they will invariably send the Vice president

up to preside. Because in addition to having the only constitutional duty of being President of the Senate presiding over the body, his most important authority really comes to play on a tie vote. He can cast the deciding vote. I have seen that happen, though it has been quite rare. Your records will show how many there were. The Vice President can always, of course, “bump” a senator from the chair as can the President Pro Tem. Senator Byrd picks his spots. But Senator Byrd is such a Senate traditionalist that he carries with him, as other senators have in the past, just a very slight annoyance regarding the functions and authority of the Vice President.

For example, Mondale mentioned in his speech the other night that as Vice President-elect he was installed in the Lyndon Johnson Room, and then he got a call from Senator Byrd, who said, “I want you out of there by January 2nd.” Byrd wasn't the originator of that idea. It was Mike Mansfield with Lyndon Johnson. If you remember, there was a movement when Johnson went down to be Vice President, that he should come back to chair the Democratic caucus. I think the record will show that originally under pressure, Mansfield was inclined to go along with that. But then it he switched and became very adamant that there be that division between the Senate and the vice president in administrative functions. They named the room the Lyndon Baines Johnson Room, it was not the “Vice President's” room anymore. If you remember, there was a small office adjunct to the LBJ Room and then he had his ceremonial office. Those were the only two rooms the Vice President had in the Capitol at the time.

It was interesting to me to watch the joint session in New York the other day. Cheney was there and presiding. That's not unusual. That's protocol. But Senator Byrd the President Pro Tempore wasn't even there. In joint sessions in the House, if the vice president isn't going to be there, for any reason or perhaps traveling, Byrd will be there. If the vice president attends, Byrd seldom goes to the joint sessions. I want to be careful how I say this, it's not an intentional pique situation. It's just another demonstration of his independence from the administration, the vice president and the president.

This whole discussion this morning started with the idea of how Vice President Mondale was allocated space in the West Wing of the White House, and I thought it was important to get for the record the actual circumstances of how that came about. It has made a great deal of difference. As I have said to you over the phone, one of the rarest things in the world is original thought. Now, it may not have been an original thought on Bob's part, but it was certainly a timely thought that came at an opportune time.

Speaking of Carter, and this is just a very, very short vignette—on his inauguration day, after all the hoopla out on the steps where he was sworn in, he came in and immediately went into [Allen] Ellender's office hideaway. If you come out of S-207, that's the Mansfield Room, and turn right and just jog around the corner on the left is a large room, a large hideaway suite in which Ellender had put a little kitchen. That's where they brought Carter following the inauguration in preparation for the inaugural lunch. At the desk they had prepared his first official documents. I think they were appointments. There weren't many, I think two or three. But when he sat down, I was standing maybe six feet away, he looked around and there was no pen on the desk. I reached in my pocket where I had one of these gold Cross pens and handed it to him. He signed his first official document with that pen and handed it back to me. I put it in my pocket. Later I told Bob about it as I still had the pen.

I gave it to him as sort of a memento and he later said, "I kept that pen and gave it to President Carter in the spring of 1989 in the hope that he would put it in his library." Well, he may have. I don't know. It was a very unimportant thing. But most history that you deal with is made up of lots of little unimportant things. And that's one.

So, there Don, is the saga of the Vice President's office in the West Wing of the White House from my standpoint. Now let's go to the other business which is a continuation of our previous discussions. I don't know where we left off.

**RITCHIE:** We had taken you to the time when you were Army Liaison and then when your first came up here first as Administrative Assistant to Senator Mansfield and then became Democratic Secretary. What I would like to do is get you to reflect on the job of the Democratic Secretary, the Majority Secretary, because I am not sure that people outside the Senate understand or appreciate what the party Secretaries do. I wonder if you could just describe the functions of that office.

**KIMMITT:** I will try to describe the functions during my time because things change and procedures, personnel and personalities change. But they don't seem to change basically or significantly.

When I became Secretary for the Majority, as you know, it was probably within a year or less after the former Secretary for the Majority Bobby Baker of South Carolina had the job. During that transition period between administrations, when Kennedy and Johnson had gone to the White House and Bobby stayed behind, Mansfield was elected Majority Leader and he inherited Bobby.

For all the time of the Lyndon Johnson majority leadership, Bobby Baker was a very influential staffer. I don't think I am overstating it by saying he was probably the most influential staff person in the Senate during the Johnson majority leader era. Following are my words, not somebody else's. Apparently, Bobby just couldn't stand prosperity. He was involved with a lot of our friends who were still *de rigueur*. They had a couple of rooms or suites put together in the Congressional Hotel named The Quorum Club. Bobby was one of the original founders of the Quorum Club which later became the 116 Club which is still in existence and still of that very selective membership, very hard to get into, almost impossible and still run by a lot of way old curmudgeons who remember the "good old days."

At any rate, Bobby fell into disrepute, not only because of his antics on the Eastern Shore, with the Carousel Motel, the girls, the lobbying, and the partying. But he also—and I have no idea of the details—got involved with the soft drink machine business and was either taking kickbacks or getting money in some manner. Just getting carried away with his freedom of action which was going on in the Lyndon Johnson years. I don't know what started the house of cards tumbling down, but he was in deep trouble.

I was not here at that time. I was in Europe still in the Army. We came home in '64 and I think it was in '64 that this took place. I remember traveling with Senator Richard Russell one time and discussing this incident with him. At this time I was still in the Army. In that interim between July of '64 and January of '66 when I got out and went to work for Mansfield. I traveled with Russell over in Europe and we were discussing this. I just brought the matter up. He said, "Well, Bobby came to me" (meaning Russell) "and asked for my help because he felt he was getting a bad deal from whoever was attempting to prosecute him. I said I just had one question for him after he told me his story. I said 'Do you have any Internal Revenue problems?'" Bobby said, "No." He said, "Of course, that turned out to be untrue. There was nothing I could do or wanted to do." That dropped the Russell conversation.

In 1964, I came back from New York in '64 and the Army put me back over here to head the Army Liaison Office in the Senate where I served twice before. This time I was to be the chief. In the meantime Mansfield had gotten rid of Bobby and had moved in his alter ego at that time, Frank Valeo, who was not really on the Senate staff. He might have been on the Senate staff by that time, but he had been on loan from the Library of Congress. He was a speech writer and a think tank person for Mansfield. They could sit in a room and never say a word and be communicating because their minds went in the same direction. It was Asia, Vietnam, world politics, and Johnson, and the whole damn thing.

Mike Mansfield never had a male staffer that he leaned on. He did have one when he was first elected to the House. He brought back with him a man named Jimmy Sullivan from Butte. He was with him as AA in the House and came over here for awhile. Then Peggy DeMichele took over and she was with him all the time. His whole staff were women, women, and women. He had one exception, a young man named Ray Dockstader. When Mansfield left we put him over in the Library of Congress at the Folklife Center. But he never had a male staffer, AA or anything else. He looked upon Valeo as certainly one of the closest, and later Charlie Ferris later became even closer to him. He would rely on Charlie for policy as director of the Policy Committee.

He had a young man Harry McPherson who went to the White House during the Johnson era who is now down with Verner, Liipfert, McPherson, Hand. He first ran the Policy Committee and Charlie took over along with Dan Leach. Mansfield had Valeo and Ferris, and a young man in the cloakroom working for Bobby named John Graves. When Bobby fell out, Mansfield had nowhere to go in a hurry to fill the Secretary of the Majority, so he nominated Frank Valeo, who was elected. I digress here for a moment. In those days the officers of the Senate were elected. They are still elected pro forma, but they seem to be anointed before they are elected. Frank had no political acumen. He had no political sensitivity. He was apolitical. He would get in his office with those long legal pads and write speeches for Mansfield and write memos, and write, write, write. He hardly knew who worked for him. When he became Secretary for the Majority he just didn't fit with the members. He was a square peg in a round hole. Skeeter Johnson was Secretary of the Senate. I give that as background and Skeeter had as his deputy a man from Georgia, Emory Frazier.

Mansfield called me in around November, December and said "Did you ever think about

getting out of the Army?" I really never had. I was happy in the Army. I knew I was going to go to Vietnam which was the breeding ground for new generals and I was a colonel at the time. I said "no," and he said, "Would you think about it?" I said, "For what purpose?" He said, "Not immediately, but after awhile I would like you to become Secretary of the Majority. Frank is in there now." I said, "Let me think about it." It was a hell of a big decision on my part. In retrospect I kept him waiting for ten days or two weeks for an answer. In that interim, Scoop Jackson, Senator Jackson of Washington, was going to Vietnam and I was going as an army officer at his request to escort him. But I filled out my retirement papers and then said to my chief liaison, I think it was General Weyand who later became Chief of Staff, "I am going to Vietnam if I can find a job over there that I like, when I come back I will tear these up, but if I can't find the right spot, I am going to put them in."

I went to Vietnam, went all over Nam. Every time I asked about getting a command as a colonel or to become Chief of Staff of a division or one of those high-profile spots, I would get the same response: "Relax, you had your War College, you had your division artillery, you've punched all the tickets, give somebody else a chance, you are going to be a general." These were general officers who told this. So I came back and put the papers in. I think I retired the last day of January in '66 and went to work the next day for Senator Mansfield as Administrative Assistant to the Majority Leader. Now that was domiciled in S-208 in the Capitol. He had his little office about the size of this one, as a matter of fact, with his larger room where we would have Policy Committee meetings. Out in front we had Salpee Sahagian and Beth Shotwell, who later became Frank Valeo's wife, and then a desk for me.

I had no specific duties. I was in a holding pattern. Coming out of the Army it was a hell of a transition. I couldn't just sit there and do nothing. I didn't feel comfortable about going on the floor and trying to do anything because I was not in the policy area or was the Secretary for the Majority. I was just kind of floating along. In that interim, Senator Mansfield became somewhat disenchanted with me for reasons best known to him and it doesn't make any difference now. But I was getting a little tenuous about the job and whether or not I had made the right decision.

Then came the time when the new Congress started. This was January. There was a caucus. Skeeter Johnston had stepped down, probably under gentle nudging by Mansfield, as Secretary of the Senate. The recommendation was made, I am sure by Senator Metcalf,

nominating Frank Valeo to be Secretary of the Senate. I was in there at that time as an observer on the back row. Before action was taken on the nomination Senator Russell spoke up and said “Well, this is somewhat of a surprise to me,” in that genteel Georgian manner. He said, “Where does that leave Emory Frazier?” Well, Mansfield immediately knew that he got himself crosswise with Russell, and immediately called off the election of the Secretary of the Senate and very shortly adjourned the caucus. There were other matters, but that won out.

They came back again in a caucus in a day or two. At that time, he had reached a compromise with Russell (I am surmising this now) and that was to elect Emory Frazier as Secretary of the Senate for a six-month period, after which Frank Valeo would become Secretary of the Senate. There was still nothing said about the Secretary of the Majority. Then it came close to the time to face who was going to become Secretary for the Majority.

Now John Graves who was there, and was running the cloakroom, had been very close to Valeo. He was being considered as was I. Mansfield called me in before the caucus—the caucus was usually at 9:30, 10:00—he called me in about eight o'clock. In that very stern manner, he said, “Well, I have decided to have you nominated as Secretary for the Majority.” There was all this nervous tension up to this point. I said, “Thank you very much, sir.” He said, “Well, it wasn't an easy choice and I have given it a lot of thought. John Graves has done a good job out there.” Well, that indicated to me that between the time that he encouraged me to get out for this job and he actually had to make the decision, that I had pissed him off somewhere. But I didn't know what it was. At any rate, I took over as Secretary for the Majority and John Graves was my assistant. I moved down to where the Democratic Whip now is on the first floor [SB-141], Bobby's office, which is a large ornate office. It looked right down the Mall at the monuments. It was beautiful. Far above what I thought a staffer should have. But I was there for months.

I took over the job, not really knowing what the hell it was all about. I soon learned that everything on the floor of the Senate, pretty much the administrative details, come under the Secretary of the Senate—everything about the arranging the desks, the papers on the desks and all of the procedural matters, that was the Secretary of the Senate. Secretary for the Majority had another job. One of the first jobs was to assign desks to senators when there was a death, election, or change of party by a member.

This became a very interesting process. We had 68 senators, and when the election came the question was the order of precedence among the senators. There was no doubt that Majority Leader's desk and the Whip's desk were fixed, regardless of who the person was who occupied them. But seated right behind the Majority Leader was the most senior and influential Democratic senator, and that was Richard Russell. All senators tried to move more towards the center and the front. Concurrently, on the Republican side Mark Trice and his people, their senators were moving more to the center aisle and to the front. But in order to arrange those, you had to go to every senator and give them an option before you could move anyone else.

Obviously, the first one I went to was Senator Russell and understandably, he didn't want to change his desk. Then I would go to the next senior Democratic senator and show a chart of the open desks that were available. The one rule had to be that you get one bite at the apple. Whatever seats are open at that moment if it is your turn to make a choice, you as a senator can choose one of those seats and then moves on. If he didn't choose to move, the senator remains where he is and you go to the next member. Well, in this process those open seats sort of float around.

Steve Young of Ohio was an acerbic little individual. When I came to him one time, there were three or four seats open and I offered him a chance to change his seat. He indicated no, he didn't want any of those, he wanted to be somewhere else. I said, "Senator, I am sorry they are taken, but you have to make a decision as to what the seats are available now." Which was true. He said, "Well then, I'll stay here." I went down the line to the others and suddenly one of the seats opened over there that was more in an area where he wanted to be. Well, I couldn't go back to him and say, "You get a second chance." So he went to Mansfield and just raised hell saying, "I want to be over there" and so on. Well, the Leader, of course, backed me up. But I was never in good graces with Steve Young thereafter.

It takes weeks to complete this process until you get everybody assigned their desks. Invariably the most junior senators end up in the rear at the farthest corner near the desk of the Secretary for the Majority, an old desk that sits in the corner and is seldom used. However, if a senator such as a Kennedy or a [Russell] Long, or up in New Hampshire Norris Cotton wanted a certain desk from one of the original senators from their state's predecessors. He got it and we moved the desk. So, the Kennedys, as I recall, Ted Kennedy had the desk that Jack and

maybe even Bobby had. The desk could be moved, but the location could not. That is long discussion of one of the duties of the Secretary for the Majority. We have already covered getting the presiding officer.

One of the duties which was practiced by Bobby Baker and which I practiced when I was there with Mansfield, was that when a vote came, I would stand just inside the center door of the Senate on the Democratic side and *if asked* by a senator coming in what the issue was or what the situation was, I would explain it. I would never under Mansfield's direction suggest to a senator how he should vote. I say "he" because in those days there were no women on the Democratic side. Margaret Chase Smith was on the Republican side. But if they asked usually I would say, "This is an amendment proposed by Senator X and the opposition is Senator Y" and a brief, very brief description of the amendment. Usually most senators only want to know who was for it and who against and they immediately know which way they are going. I would stand there at every vote and just be prepared to pass that on.

There are several little vignettes and anecdotes on that one. Right in front of me at that time, on the back row nearest to me was Senator [William] Proxmire. Proxmire, of course, was somewhat contentious in his ideas and he proposed many, many things and lost votes on them. So it was critical for me on any issue, to be very accurate and fair. I felt like I was in the confessional with a priest in there and when I would make these descriptions, I knew Proxmire would be listening. He complimented me several times on the way I handled it even though he may not have agreed with issue at the time.

Another time I remember, Bobby Kennedy came in the side door of the Senate and walked around behind the Republicans coming in our direction. It was some social welfare program, I am sure, a Kennedy-like issue, and Bobby stopped and asked what was going on. I started to explain and his staffer came up from a corner and said, "No, no, no, Senator, don't listen to him." To his credit Bobby Kennedy said to him, "Go over and sit down. He is just doing his job," which made me feel pretty good.

Dick Russell told me a story that when Bobby [Baker] had that location and position and practiced that procedure, Russell walked in the back center door and started down towards his seat and Baker said "Your vote is no." Johnson was in the Majority Leader's chair and it was

perceived by everybody that when Baker said your vote is this and that, that it was Johnson's desire. Russell said he got four steps down the aisle and he turned around and came back and said, "Bobby, don't you ever again suggest how I should vote. The people of Georgia have that privilege." He turned around and sat down. It was an effective way for Lyndon Johnson to let his Democrats know what his position with the Leadership was as they went by Bobby. He didn't live by the rule unless they asked. He would just spit it out.

The only time I would do that would be under the direction of Mansfield himself who would tell me, and this was very rare—I can't think of more than ten times in eleven years, maybe—"The Leadership position is X." When he would tell me that, then I would freely say, "The Leadership position is x,y,z."

One of the most important functions of the Secretary for the Majority was to be the only staffer in the Steering Committee. I hope I can explain this in an intelligent manner. The Steering Committee is a committee of around twelve members to assign committee seats to senators. The Senate Rules at that time required that a senator have two major committee seats on the thirteen major committees. He must have two. There have been occasions where senators only wanted one, but they had to take another one. They could have one minor committee, under the Senate Rules. The minor committee being Aging, Veterans Affairs, Small Business, Indian Affairs, Ethics, Aging, Intelligence, and others. Then there are special committees and select committees. The steering committee brings to a vote every new assignment.

The Chairman of the Steering Committee was Mansfield. I was the only staffer, although I did bring Gail Martin in, my assistant, to keep notes. All requests for committees would have to be in writing, understandably, and they would be addressed to the Majority Leader as chairman of the Steering Committee. They would all be referred to me. I would have to place these requests in order of date of receipt. Then I would have to research the senator's seniority in the Senate and if there were two of them sworn in at the same time, was he a former Senator, House member, a former governor, and you finally got down to the population of the state. There were four or five or six categories. Seniority is very important, especially on committees.

Then one must determine what committee seats have become open through resignation, defeat, or death and what committee seats are available. Then you try to match up slates.

Obviously, the big four, as we called them were the two A's and the two F's. They were Appropriations, Armed Services, Foreign Relations, and Finance. They were always the four most sought after committees, always, in the Senate. I think the original rules of the Senate called for an Appropriations Committee of fifteen members, I think now it is twenty-eight. The Steering Committee can adjust the size of committees as they go through this process. So the Appropriations Committee might have one or two vacancies and you would have a list of maybe a dozen applicants. After going through this sieve of qualifications, in order of priority, only meant that they had that priority, but it did not ensure in any way their acceding to the position. Seniority was only one factor.

Then we got even more complicated than that in my tenure in that there were murmurings and disenchantment with the allocation of committee seats by regions of the country. We worked at the staff level very hard with a big map and we analyzed how many Democrats there were in the western region and then in the Midwest and the East and the South. There were four regions. Then we would study, manipulate and find out by percentage what each region was entitled on that committee. So if you get the combination of individual, seniority, individual precedence, individual desires, compare that with openings and then superimpose on this the requirement that each region of the country was entitled to its percentage, it became complicated. For example, if there were 12.4 percent of the Democratic senators from the Midwest and there were 12.8 percent from the West, and a contest ensued with a senator from the West and a senator from the Midwest, it would enter into play and the seat may well go to the Western senator even though the Midwestern senator was senior. So it got very complicated. It was a very dynamic action to be involved in.

Invariably when new senators came to the Senate, Democratic senators, I would be called, as I was one day from Senator Byrd, saying that a new senator from Texas, Lloyd Bentsen, wanted to see me. He was down in the very room I talked to you about where Carter signed his first appointments. I went down to see him and met him for the first time. He was interested in committee assignments. Above all because Johnson had been there, and because of Texas, he wanted to get on the Armed Services Committee. Instinctively I knew why he wanted to go on there. But I also knew he wouldn't be very happy there because John C. Stennis was the chairman, or about to become chairman, and his style of running a committee was pretty much frustrating for many members. But that is beside the point. To Bentsen, like with every other senator who I talked to who wanted advice, I'd say, "Now you've just come through one election.

This is another election and you've got to campaign with members of the Steering Committee and they make the decision." So I would give them a list of all of the Steering Committee and recommend that they go around and see each one of them, literally campaign for that committee seat. So that campaign was going on all the time.

In the Steering Committee meeting itself sometimes it got quite contentious over a seat. I'll skip around about two or three different vignettes about that. I'll take as an example, John Melcher of Montana, who succeeded Mansfield. Melcher was in the House and I went over to see him primarily because of being from Montana, and offered my assistance. He is not the most pleasant person to deal with. He never looked me in the eye. He said, "When I go over there I'll expect you to do the same thing for me that you did for Mike all these years." I said, "Senator, I am Secretary for the Majority and I have to work for all the Democrats." I said, "What I would like to talk to you about are the committee assignments and give you a little heads up on the procedures and so on." I started to explain to him, "I recommend to you" (I knew there were two or three seats coming up on Appropriations) "to make an application for the Appropriations Committee early and campaign for that." "I don't want to be on the Appropriations Committee. If I wanted to be on the Appropriations Committee, I'd be on the Appropriations Committee here. I want to get on the Interior Committee."

I said, "Senator, you can't go on the Interior Committee."

He said, "What do you mean?"

I said, "Lee Metcalf is already on the Interior Committee."

He said, "What difference does that make?"

I said, "Because there is an unwritten rule that no two senators of the same party from the same state can be on the same committee. And Lee is already there."

"Well, is that a Senate rule or a party rule?"

I said, "It's a party rule."

“Well I’ll have that changed.”

He started a campaign to go on the Interior Committee, even though I told him he couldn't do it. Over the course of several weeks, word got back to Lee Metcalf, and as an exception to policy, when the Steering Committee met for the first time to decide, Lee asked to come into the committee meeting. He made a very impassioned, angry speech that his colleague was trying to get on the Interior Committee. He considered that an insult as he represented Montana there.

Even without that appearance, Melcher could not have gone on the Interior Committee. But as we went through the assignments (and there were quite a few changes that year), Scoop Jackson called me over at the table and said, “What are we going to do for Melcher?” I said, “Well, it is coming down to very few chances here. There is a seat on Commerce. Commerce takes care of Transportation. Montana’s got railroads, trucks, aviation and trade with Canada. He hasn't asked for it, but it seems to me that would be place to put him.” So he proposed Melcher to go on Commerce Committee and one other relatively unimportant one, I don't know what it was. And that's where he ended up. That was one example of committee manipulations.

Another was, senators became grandfathered into seats on committees. Once they got on the committee in the first place, there was probably very good reason for it. But when you try to solve this problem where everybody has got too many seats, you are trying to cut back, but nobody ever wants to give up a seat. There was the Johnson rule, which was every new senator should get a committee of his choice. Johnson started that for his own purposes. But he had already left. Mansfield continued that and it became an unwritten precedent. Well, there were some new senators coming in, and I don't recall them by name at this time, but one of the seated senators who had fought the seniority system ferociously all the time he was here was Joe Clark of Pennsylvania. He had three major committee seats. With this discussion about where to place a new senator and give him a committee of his choice, it became an absolute impasse. Mansfield turned to Clark and said, “Joe, you've always fought this seniority system. Why don't you give up one of your seats?” Clark said, “Oh, no, no. I am there now. I am not giving up any seat. I am going to ride with the system.” That was another factor that came into play on the thing.

Another example; Adlai Stevenson, the Senator, was on two committees because he was relatively junior and then before his next election there was a situation having to do with

changing committees. He asked, as an exception, to be given a third committee and told Mansfield and the Steering Committee that he really needed it to be reelected and after he was elected he would give it up. Well, they acquiesced, because this is where the politics comes in. Like right now, they play those committee seats. So they gave him the seat. Then he was reelected. When we next met, I recommended he fulfill the commitment, thus taking that seat away from him. All hell broke loose, he accused me above all. Then, as usual, they acquiesced and let him keep his third seat.

But committee assignments, committee seats, are one of the most exacting and sensitive areas for the Secretary for the Majority. Bill Hildenbrand and I did our best as people frittered away to back the Senate rule of every senator having two majors and one minor seat. We nearly got it down, Bill was the Secretary for the Minority, in the last year of Mansfield's reign, we only had three or four grandfathered senators left. They, of course, would be moving on in time. If they had stuck with the program they would have gotten back to what the rules called for. A senator doesn't have time for all of the things he has to do if he has more than two committees. But they wanted them. Why? Because it gives him additional staff. It gives him additional money. It gives him additional influence. They are all, I say this respectfully, greedy for all those things. Then when Mansfield left and Byrd became Majority Leader and running for his position, he obviously used the committee seat assignment as an incentive. They started building back up again and then Mitchell built them up and so on, but that is none of my business. But as I say, committee assignments are very important.

**RITCHIE:** You mentioned that Senator Johnson and Senator Byrd both used committee assignments as a way to build up the leadership authority. What about Senator Mansfield? Was he passive in this or did he take an active role?

**KIMMITT:** He was passive. Although when Mansfield served in the Senate as Whip and in his very first days, first years as Majority Leader, there was, in fact, in the Senate what was referred to as the Club. The Club was a collection of senior bipartisan, not just Democrats, senior senators, committee chairmen, ranking minority members who legislated off the floor. They would make deals among themselves. The Club ran the Senate.

Mansfield, in my opinion, never liked that system and resented it. He also resented the stranglehold the South had on the committee chairmanships. Whereas, all the time I was there,

they never violated the practice that a senior Democrat would become chairman of a committee. But any time through his appointive powers, and he had many, Mansfield could appoint senators to certain committees, investigative committees or any committees that were formed under the leadership. He would always appoint junior, newer, and more liberal senators to those committees. It irritated the senior chairmen, particularly Russell, but Mansfield was held in such respect for fairness that never would accost him. If a senator, hypothetically, George McGovern, an extreme liberal, came up with an idea for a committee, in this case Hunger, and would propose it in the caucus, if Mansfield agreed with it they would form this temporary committee and made McGovern chairman. They would plan to form them for one Congress. But they would go on and on. He would give junior members chairmanships. He would shy away from the old guard and as a result, he destroyed the Club in the Senate. Because for years that term was synonymous with the power brokers and was very accurate.

And that came from your question did he ever get involved. No, but one of the most effective tools when you are running a contest, and Byrd has run many a contest, he ran against [Ted] Kennedy, and he ran for leader a couple of times, was with the door closed, telling a senator, "If I am elected, I will see that you get on such and such a committee." It is a tool, an elective tool, it is like running an election and making campaign promises. Now, where were we?

**RITCHIE:** The duties of the Secretary. Did you get involved at all in head counting, in anticipating votes?

**KIMMITT:** Oh yeah, but again, only when directed by the leader. One of the best head counters in the Senate was Bill Hildenbrand. But he could operate with a great deal more freedom. He could go up and ask a senator on the Republican side how he was going to vote even though he had no instructions to do so. I always checked with him because he got so that he could read our side. Instinctively on most issues, you can pretty well come within two or three votes because after you been there for years, you know the senators and their patterns. But only when the Majority Leader asked me to take a head count would I do it. Sometimes it would surprise you.

One of the wiliest persons on the head count was Howard Cannon of Nevada. That's because he had an administrative assistant, Jack Conlon, who advised him to—always—never commit. "If you are uncommitted, they are going to come to you." Because once you commit,

they are through. And that's very true. If a senator has a project that he wants very badly in his state and all the other factors involved and then he comes to getting a commitment on a vote, the Panama Canal Treaty is probably an example. Once you commit, they don't come back to you again and you've lost all your bargaining power. But if you're uncommitted, even though you know how you are going to vote, but if you say, well, I just haven't made up my mind, then they are coming after you. The administration will send an emissary.

The Panama Canal, as I say, was very tight for Carter and Mondale and this became very apparent that it was going to be tight. Any uncommitted senators on the Democratic side were approached and many, many deals were made because they didn't commit early. So, yes, I would take head counts. Cannon would say, "I'm still thinking about that, Stan." A lot of them it was just pro forma because everyone knew how they were going to vote anyway. But the swing votes, and there are always swing votes on any issue, there are the conservative and the liberals and the moderates and most all of the swing votes are nailed down to a small group of moderates.

I know I have told you this story, but I am going to repeat it. It was told to me by Senator Richard Russell at a hotel room in Athens one night, just the two of us sitting there. We were talking about the Senate and so on and got on the civil rights fights and so on and he told me this anecdote: One day they were debating, this was early on before the big '64 civil rights bill, there were quite a number of senators on the floor, particularly the southerners because it was an important bill and a debate was going on. Senator [William] Langer of North Dakota came in the back door. They called him "Bull" Langer. He always had an unlit cigar in his mouth and he was a brawler. He was a picturesque individual. He stopped at the back door and listened for maybe about ten or fifteen seconds. Civil rights in North Dakota didn't mean a damn thing except when it came to the American Indians and they hadn't gotten much recognition yet. There were very few blacks out there. He walked down the center of the aisle and stopped next to Russell and said, "Dick, want me to vote with you today?" Russell said, "Senator, that would be very nice. We need all the help we can get on these matters." "All right, I am with you," and he went over and sat down.

Russell turned around to Lister Hill and said Langer is with us and Hill passed onto Sparkman and old Harry Byrd and all of the Stennis and the rest of them. The debate went on and on. During the debate very innocently one and more of these Democratic senators would get up and go to Langer's desk and shake hand with him. So about 4:30 or 5:00 in the afternoon, the

vote came up and boom, he voted against them. Russell said, "You know it didn't faze him a bit. He came down in the well and walked past me and said, 'Dick, I didn't vote with you today, did I?'" Russell said, "No, Senator, you didn't. That surprised me after what you told me. But I am sure you had your reasons." He said, "Well, that's one thing you've got to learn about me. I can change my mind faster than any son of a bitch you have ever seen." And walked off the floor.

The only reasons these stories are important are the sources. There are lots of stories, but when you get them directly from the member, it is important.

**RITCHIE:** Would most people keep their pledge if they said yes or no?

**KIMMITT:** Oh yes, that is the one thing in the Senate that is, in my opinion, inviolate, i.e., you do not break your word to another senator. Now it is perfectly all right and acceptable to make a commitment by saying, "Don, I am voting with you today." It is perfectly acceptable if two hours later before the vote I come back to you and say, "Don, I gave my word, but I have to take that back, because I have this, that, and the other thing." That is permissible and understandable. The cardinal sin is to commit and not keep your word. There are people who may break their word, but in an open vote they are identified. In a secret ballot like in the caucus, they are not and lots of people can back out on their vote there and not be known.

One of my classic memories is Russell Long when he was being challenged by Kennedy for Whip, I was in his office and we went down the list and the phone rang and it was Johnson in the White House, the President. He asked Long how his campaign was going. "Well, we're coming along," you know how Russell Long talks. Apparently Johnson said, "Well, go down the list and tell me who's with you, tell me what you got." So Russell Long started going down the list, telling him who was for him and who was doing that. Johnson said, "How about Mansfield?" Long said, "Oh, Mike is with me." Johnson said, "What did he say to you?" Long said, "I asked him and he said I didn't have to worry about his vote." Johnson said, "He's against you. That is not a commitment." I am paraphrasing now, because I didn't hear it. He said, "He would never vote against a Kennedy and he's going to vote against you and he did not make a commitment." Well, that is the way it turned out.

Now I brought this up to Mansfield years later, probably within the last eight years. I told

him about this anecdote and he just chuckled, not denying, just chuckled. Going back to your point, you never break a commitment on a vote. Going back to the comment that I made that the officers used to be elected, rather than anointed, even though they are elected, if the Majority Leader wants somebody it is just a pro forma action.

When Mansfield stepped down and Byrd was running for Majority Leader and I had been talked to by Gaylord Nelson and Dee Huddleston to run against Valeo to be Secretary of the Senate. This was a couple of months before Mansfield left, they became kind of my campaign managers and Frank's campaign manager was Harry Byrd of Virginia. I ended up winning that thing about two to one for which I was grateful. But the interesting thing I want to tell you was that Byrd was running for Majority Leader. He called me into his state office one day and sat down and said, "Now how is your campaign going?" I said, "Well, I think it is going all right, sir. I don't know. You never know until it's over." He said, "Well, you know I've got my own race on. I am not going to get involved in yours. As a matter of fact, I am not even going to tell you how I am going to vote. But I wish you well."

Well, that was wonderful. The beauty of that was in final analysis is that when I was elected in a contested election by the majority of the Democrats, I worked for both Byrd and Baker but Senator Byrd never directed me, there was no direct partisan subordinate relationship, although it was certainly clear that even though you work for the leaders, but give priority to the Majority Leader.

In those four years that I was Secretary of the Senate I was almost a free agent working for both of them and they never bothered me, except I'll bring up another case where that wasn't true and you'll understand the reason why. Once the Republicans took the Senate in November, but they didn't take office until January, Howard Baker was obviously going to be the Majority Leader. He was the Minority Leader and I was going to be out of a job, which was understandable. He sent word to me through Hildenbrand that Murray Zweben, the Parliamentarian, had to go and he wanted me to take care of that before he became Majority Leader, because it was going to happen anyway.

So I called Murray and gave him the bad news. He had made some rulings, you know that whole mess which the Republicans didn't like, and so I had to ask for his resignation. I did not

go to Byrd for advice on this, which may have been a mistake, but this was between Baker and me and Murray. Then Byrd said, "I wish you had come to me and advised me before you took that action." I said, "Well, sir, perhaps I should have, but that was a directive, a request from the Minority Leader about to be the Majority Leader and I had to honor it." So that may have put a little dent in my relationship with Byrd.

That is one of the only times when either Byrd or Baker directed me to do something. It was the most wonderful thing in the world. Because had Byrd influenced the nomination and elected me then—you know Byrd, like Terry Sauvain who can't get out of his chair—the senator wants people around him night and day. I was fortunately spared that crucible. But Byrd was always wonderful to me. We never had a problem officially, of any kind that I could think of.

**RITCHIE:** Did you have a sense, though, that if he had been elected Majority Leader in 1976, that he would have wanted somebody different as Democratic Secretary? Do you think he would have wanted his own person in that job?

**KIMMITT:** Oh yes, I think so. Because, I know this is true, I stepped down in '81, January, and the Democrats took it back—

**RITCHIE:** Eighty-six, they came back. Republicans were in the majority for six years then. Byrd was Majority Leader when they came back.

**KIMMITT:** Well, anyway when the Democrats took the Senate back over. First of all, when the Republicans took the Senate, there was precedent for Secretary of the Senate—I think it was Mark Trice—reverting to be Secretary for the Minority. I was in effect hoping or trying to rationalize how that could happen. Anyway, that didn't happen because either my sense or something else indicated that Byrd would not support that.

Then when they took the Senate back, I had visions of running again for Secretary of the Senate, having been disposed involuntarily and for no reason. I even went so far as to write a letter to a few senators saying I was going to run. Then I ran into Senator Byrd in the hall while this was going on and he said, "I'd like to talk to you. I understand you were thinking of running for Secretary of the Senate again." I said, "Well, yes, I am thinking of the idea, but I certainly

want to come talk to you about it.” He said, “Well, I don't think my colleagues would deny me the opportunity to place my own man in there.” So I wrote these people back quickly and said I wasn't going to get involved.

When he became Majority Leader, he didn't put Joe [Stewart] in as Secretary for the Majority right away. He put a young fellow from Rhode Island, Jim Duffy, and he left, and even Terry Sauvain was in there as Secretary for the Majority for a short while. Joe didn't want it, I think, this is just my theory, because he had been so close to Bobby Baker that he didn't want to have Baker's former title. But he became, of course, the power behind the throne. As Byrd went on he had another young man, Pat Griffin, and a lady, Abbey Saffold. Then Joe became Secretary of the Senate and he was a great one, a good one. But Joe had tools as Secretary of the Senate that I never had in that Byrd would support him on anything he unilaterally wanted to do. With Mansfield, I wouldn't propose anything because the old man kept everything so close. But Joe was a good Secretary. He achieved a lot. But we achieved a lot while we were in there, too.

Well, we've been rambling again, Don. I don't know where the hell we are now.

**RITCHIE:** This is great.

**KIMMITT:** Just rummaging through the past and seeing where we're going. I don't think this should terminate it.

**RITCHIE:** No. What I would like to do is to talk a little bit more about this period and a little bit more about when you were Secretary in that period and also your connections with the Senate since then, because you have been here pretty regularly. I see you in the Hart atrium on a regular basis.

**KIMMITT:** Oh, I wander through. I should have done this a long time ago, but I belong to the three biggest clubs in the world. You know what they are? The woulda's, the shoulda's, and the coulda's.

**End of the Third Interview**