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1992-1996

Oral History Interviews

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THE ROAD TO WASHINGTON

Interview #1

Thursday, December 5, 1996

RITCHIE: I know you came from Edmond, Oklahoma

JOHNSTON: Correct.

RITCHIE: I wonder if you could just tell me about your family and your roots in Oklahoma.

JOHNSTON: Well, a former Republican National Committee Chairman, the late Lee Atwater, once described his background as being from the middle of the middle class. That's pretty much mine as well. I was born in 1956, in fact, right before the election that year. My father was twenty-one. Mother had just turned nineteen when I was born. My father was doing mostly manual work in and around Edmond, Oklahoma. I moved around a great deal as a child, always in Oklahoma. We lived in a variety of small towns from Edmond to Tulsa, where my sister Jan was born. My dad worked in a warehouse for Pillsbury there and then he got into insurance, actually the credit investigation business. We lived in such huge metropolises as Guymon, Kingfisher, Stillwater, El Reno, Oklahoma City, and Washington, Oklahoma, where I finished high school.

There were twenty-eight in my high school graduating class in 1974. I first attended a big high school in Oklahoma City, named after U.S. Grant, and moved to a very small farm community. The experience was very good because I went from large classes to very small classes where the only course required all four years was agriculture. It was a wonderful experience. I graduated from the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma in Chickasha, Oklahoma, where I had received a scholarship to play baseball. I had been an all-conference short stop in the high school. The college had recruited six short stops to play that year and I was *not* the best one. I wound up actually earning a debate scholarship--and we never developed a debate team. Then I went to work for a newspaper and had journalism scholarships sponsored by my company, the Donrey Media Group.

I chose that school because I was in kind of a hurry to move on with my career. I had plans to either go into the military or journalism, which seems like an odd combination. I got into journalism. My first big story as a college student was to cover then President [Gerald] Ford's visit to Lawton, Oklahoma, during the 1976 campaign. He was on his way to see the OU-Texas football game. I covered that story, and people noticed it. When I graduated in December of 1976--I went on a year round trimester system and finished college in two and a half years--I became an Oklahoma State Capital reporter for the Donrey Group. They had twelve small newspapers in Oklahoma. I covered the 35th legislature of the Oklahoma State Legislature. I did that for a session as a very young twenty-one-year-old reporter. I did not do a very good job because I had no mentoring and no real training, but it was a trial by fire. I enjoyed it.

After doing that for a brief while, they moved me to be editor of the newspaper in Henryetta, Oklahoma. In 1977 the paper was in some financial trouble and that was attributed in part to a very weak news division. The news division in those days was two people: an editor and an assistant. I really had a tremendous amount of fun. I had a free rein as editor to write and do whatever I wished, and develop some photography skills. I was an active editorial writer. I could be very controversial, but it was a lot of fun and the paper began to thrive again just by having a high degree of energy.

1978 was a very big year for politics in Oklahoma. It had a dramatic influence on me. Senator Dewey Bartlett developed cancer, chose not to run for reelection, and then Governor David Boren was running for his seat. I'd covered Boren when I was State Capital reporter. We had a very competitive race for governor that year between George Nigh and a former OU football star [Ron Shotts]. We had a very competitive race for Attorney General. There was a lot of political activity. Being a political junkie, I just thrived as a reporter. The one thing that I found very frustrating was that I was missing the action. I wanted to be in the action. I wanted to be involved in running a campaign.

So right before the election, actually near Labor Day of 1978, I met a Republican candidate for Congress named Gary Richardson who was running against, we thought, Congressman Ted Risenhoover. Well, Risenhoover was

defeated in the primary by a young guy named Mike Synar, in Oklahoma's Second Congressional District. I knew Mike. My paper had endorsed Mike in his primary. I wrote the editorial. I didn't think Mike was going to win the primary. Well, he did but I had already committed to work for the Republican candidate so it was really an odd paradox for me. But it was a very educational experience because it taught me that you could have friends even though you're in political combat on both sides of the aisle. It's very instructive and it proved to be a very useful skill for me here in the United States Senate.

We narrowly lost that race but during the campaign we had neighboring congressmen come in and campaign for us, one of whom was John Paul Hammerschmidt from Arkansas. Congressman Hammerschmidt called me, as I was contemplating my unemployment after the election was over, and said, "I need a press secretary, would you like to come to Washington?" It took me I think about a tenth of a microsecond to say yes. I packed up my little 1975 Datsun B210 car with boxes and began my trek that December to Washington. A nice long drive on ice-covered roads through Arkansas and Tennessee up to Washington. That was my first trip ever into D.C. I remember just being *awestruck* as I was driving down Constitution Avenue on a very beautiful winter day on, I think it was the day after New Year's, just seeing the buildings--it was a cold but gorgeous day--and then parking within a block or two of the Cannon Building and walking over to see the Congressman in his office in the Rayburn Building, in a role being a staff assistant.

It was quite a transition, coming from a small Oklahoma town to Capitol Hill. Again, much like my reporting experience, I did not do very well. I didn't really have a mentor, didn't have any friends here in town. It was kind of a lonely experience for a while, but in the process I developed, in that year, a great deal of knowledge. I enjoyed writing, communication. My political skills and instincts were at work doing press calls. I made a lot of mistakes, but I learned from them. Congressman Hammerschmidt was fortunately very patient with me. I believe the reason that he hired me was that he was seriously considering running for the Senate in 1980 against Dale Bumpers. When his personal friend George Bush decided to run for President instead he changed his mind and chaired Bush's campaign in Arkansas. When he changed his plans, I believe, is

when it became in my mind apparent that there really wasn't a need for me. The Congressman was not what I would call a media-savvy member. He just was not all that interested in doing a lot with the press.

Now I felt somewhat useless and so I jumped at the chance to go to the National Restaurant Association as a communications director. It was my first foray into the association world in an advocacy role. It proved to be a very fun experience. I was given a lot of free rein there. I was spokesman for the food service industry (a role I now am going to in the private sector again, but for a different part of the industry) and found myself travelling with the association chairman around the country doing his advance work, writing his speeches, and being with him during all these visits. I met scores of people. Our chairman was Bill Regis and he still owns and operates a restaurant in Knoxville, Tennessee. He's a close friend of Howard Baker, very politically conservative and active. Of course, 1980 was a big political year so he and I struck a very close friendship. I wrote a lot of speeches where he basically was all but endorsing Ronald Reagan everywhere we went.

During the course of the campaign because of my past political experience, my friend Gary Richardson was running *again* against Mike Synar. His consultant, a man named Eddie Maye, who's still active in the business, called me and said "He wants you to come here to help." So once again I took a leave of absence for about six weeks and went out and tried to help the campaign. It was a disaster. He lost, again narrowly, but it was still a defeat. A friend of mine from Oklahoma who had been helping to run another race in Indiana called and said that this young, twenty-seven-year-old House member named John Hiler needed a press secretary and would I come back to the Hill. I said, "Absolutely."

I loved working on Capitol Hill and really wanted to be in a freshman office. I think I was the third person he'd actually hired, one of four people who began the office on Day One, back on that nice cold January morning in 1981. That was a very formative experience because it gave me a chance to come into an operation from the start with a congressman who was himself young in experience yet bright. He gave me a lot of leeway to try to be very aggressive on press and again really honed my political and communication skills during the

three years I worked for him. I helped to run his first reelection campaign, which he was declared that night's first loser. That was the '82 debacle for the Republicans. They lost twenty-six seats nationally. [CBS anchorman] Dan Rather at 7:30 p.m. that night declared Hiler the first GOP casualty. Well, later that night as the final returns came in, he got a three-thousand vote victory. Again, that was quite instructive.

I stayed with Hiler for an additional year and then had a chance to move over to the National Republican Congressional Committee to be responsible for the reelection campaigns of endangered GOP incumbents in the House. Well, '84 was not a year in which GOP incumbent House members had much to worry about. Ronald Reagan was going to win in a landslide. The question was how many seats were we going to gain. But I was given nine incumbents around the country to work with, people like Congressman Denny Smith of Oregon, Congressman Chris Smith of New Jersey, Congressman Bill Carney of New York, Congressman Arlan Stangeland of Minnesota, and Manuel Lujan from New Mexico. There were others on that list--Tom Ridge of Pennsylvania, now the Governor of the state. In each case I developed a good friendship with each of those members. These are districts all over the country. I gained remarkable experience about different political environments, built friendships and alliances that last to this day.

RITCHIE: What were you doing for each of these races?

JOHNSTON: Basically, campaign committees have special provisions under campaign finance law to contribute dollars beyond the usual cash limits. So my role was to just be an unpaid consultant, to make sure that the money being spent by the committee was being spent well, and that we were a "player" at the table in terms of when campaign decisions were made. I travelled around the districts with each one of the members, developed close friendships with Tom Ridge and Chris Smith in particular.

The most unique experience for me was going in to help one convicted member that year. The bylaws at the NRCC prohibited us from supporting people who have been convicted of felonies. At one point, then Chairman Guy

Vander Jagt thought that we'd have a chance to gain control of the House. So in early October they changed it. They basically changed the provision that would permit me to go in and help that member named George Hansen from Idaho. They gave me \$40,000 in coordinated dollars. They gave me the \$15,000 in cash out of the Committee and said, "Kelly go in there. We can't afford to lose Hansen. He may make the difference if we have control or not. Go in there and help him." It was a disaster. There was no way he was going to win. But it was a lot of fun to be given that much money, which was a lot for a rural western congressional district in a very inexpensive media market. He went from being down from like forty points to losing by less than 170 votes. That gave me a great deal of confidence in my political ability that I could do the right things politically.

I remained at the Congressional Committee during the 1986 cycle. I was given the "fast" growing areas, Sunbelt states, Arizona, New Mexico, then over to, Texas, Oklahoma, staying right outside the Deep South states that were in the perimeter to the South and the Southwest, and had the fastest growth rates in the country with the exception of California. I struck a very close friendship with a candidate by the name of Jon Kyl and after 1986 was wonderful. In a year in which the Republicans lost five seats in the House, my region gained two seats. The two members I helped most to elect in Democratic open seats were Jim Inhofe from Tulsa, who became a close friend of mind during that cycle and remains a close friend to this day, and I'm glad he's here in the Senate. And a guy named Clyde Hallaway running in a seat that was once held by one of the Longs in Louisiana. In both cases they were upsets.

Newly-elected congressman Jon Kyl wanted a Washington hand he trusted to run his office, so once again it was back to a freshman office. Again it was a wonderfully successful experience. He was unopposed for his first reelection campaign except by a Libertarian candidate. Then Senator [Don] Nickles became Chairman of the Senatorial Committee over here. I had had very little contact with Senator Nickles. I encountered him when he was a state senate candidate in 1978, when I was a reporter. I really had no contact with him since. I ran into him a few times during the 1980 campaign when I was working for Gary Richardson and he was running for Senate in the race. Nobody thought he was

going to win. A thirty-year-old candidate running against an experienced prosecutor. No way he was going to do that well, but he won.

Through a mutual friend I was approached about becoming a deputy political director to handle mostly incumbent races, the same races that were up this last cycle [1996]. People like Jesse Helms, Strom Thurmond, Larry Pressler, John Warner--people that were potentially in trouble during a mid-term election during [George] Bush's presidency. Nickles hired me, and that's when he and I struck up a close friendship. We had, from my perspective, a successful cycle. I was given mostly incumbents. Every one of them was elected that I was responsible for and again I developed an expertise and developed contacts and friendships in states that I'd never worked in before from South Carolina to Nebraska. I had Nebraska and South Dakota. I remember driving a forty thousand piece mailing in a truck from Pierre to Sioux Falls, South Dakota, one afternoon for Larry Pressler. Those kinds of experiences gained you a lot of friendships.

I'd always known that loyalty is the single most important attribute a senator or any politician looks for in having somebody in his inner circle. And the most important way to gain that loyalty or gain that relationship is to be there in a tough campaign. If I can paraphrase Bob Dole, "that's what it's all about." If you're there with them when their survival or their careers are at stake and you're there fighting with them, you built bonds that you could *never* come close to making just by working in a Senate office or a House office. I found those campaign experiences both in the House and the Senate to be incredibly powerful bonding experiences. Not just working in particular campaigns but in so many campaigns in so many parts of the country. It gave me a political perspective that I've really gained a tremendous amount of benefit from over the last several years, working with states that are as diverse as Minnesota to South Carolina and Arizona. They are three very unique states. And I've been able to maintain friendships all these years.

RITCHIE: You said you were always a political junkie from the very beginning. Did you grow up in a political family?

JOHNSTON: No, not at all. In 1966 I was a twelve turning thirteen year old boy. My parents were not politically active. They were conservative Democrats in Oklahoma, which was very typical for Oklahomans in those days. My parents had been John F. Kennedy supporters in 1960 and then Barry Goldwater supporters in 1964. I just found an automatic fascination with campaigns and politics.

I distinctly remember coming out of a grocery store one day with my parents and there was a brochure in our car window from a guy named Raymond Gary, a former Governor running for his old job again. I was struck by the language and gained a fascination. I was hooked. At one point--I don't know quite how I did this--but I wound up being pulled into distributing brochures that year for Dewey Bartlett, the Republican nominee for governor.

During college, I ran for student body president and won. I was active in 1976, very active, in fact, when our native son Fred Harris (I was a Democrat in those days still) was running for president, I was his county co-coordinator in Grady County, Oklahoma, that year. As a reporter, I gained access to many of our state's officials: Henry Bellmon, Dewey Bartlett, Governor Boren in particular, who were very open. Of course, they loved reporters, they loved to talk to them, and so I was able to build friendships and gain tremendous knowledge.

RITCHIE: I talked to a reporter for the *Tulsa World* by the name of Jim Myers. He covered Oklahoma politics before it became the state capital, and he commented about how much more open it was and how much more accessible. You could go on the floor and you could talk to members. He said that when he came to Washington he had to make an appointment to see the press secretary to a member. In Oklahoma, it must have been a great way to start in journalism in an environment where the doors were all open to the press.

JOHNSTON: Yes, it really was. He's right. I covered the legislature in 1977, as I mentioned. There was no press gallery per se, there was a press table. You had to fight for space on the floor with the bigger papers and the bigger media-outlets. But you got to go on the floor. You couldn't roam around, of course, but members came to you. That was a nice part about it. But being a

reporter gave you an automatic entre with politicians that campaign workers and other lobbyist don't. So being a reporter was a magnificent way to gain insights, an education and a relationship with a wide variety of people in public life in both parties, and that has proven to be very, very helpful in my career here in Washington.

RITCHIE: Earlier you had said to me that you had some experience in radio when you were in high school.

JOHNSTON: In college, actually. I was a communications and drama major in college. We had a small little local radio station and each of us got to intern briefly at and get a little bit of radio experience. KWCO in Chickasha, Oklahoma, a little thousand watt station that didn't go beyond the city's borders.

My father tried to get me, as a young boy--I was very shy as a boy--to be more outgoing so he got me involved in speech contests. He'd been in speech and thought I should do speech contests and had somebody come to the house with the Optimist Program and recruited me. I was involved in a lot of speech contests in high school and college and studied speech and read books about speech and worked hard to kind of eliminate a lazy speech pattern that afflicts many Oklahomans. So, I worked real hard to not eliminate my accent but take out the worst aspects of my accent and lazy speech patterns. Then when I began to win some of these contests it gave me enormous confidence to approach people. In politics you can't really be shy. People can cover it up, I suppose, but you really have to be outgoing and you have to have confidence in your ability to meet people and strike up conversations and communicate, whether you're a reporter or you're running for office.

RITCHIE: Well, you said at one point when you were writing you really began to feel like you wanted to be part of the action. Did you ever see yourself as a candidate at some point?

JOHNSTON: When I was in college, yes, because I was a student body president and I thought, yeah, maybe someday I'd like to run for office. Then when I became a reporter I realized what I was happiest doing was being behind

the scenes and being a stage manager. I was very comfortable in that role. I didn't really have that much confidence to go out and be the candidate, and felt I really didn't have the background or the resources to give what it took to be successful as a candidate.

Having been involved in so many campaigns, close to forty campaigns over twenty years, I see what these people go through, and what they have to do or what the family does. I suppose if I have grown children or more personal wealth or a more independent situation, it would be something I would find intriguing. But I don't have strong desires to run. I've seen the sacrifices, I've seen the kinds of things that people have had done to them or done by them, frankly, and in some cases, I find it repulsive. I'm much more comfortable, and much happier, being part of an inner circle and giving the advice and being part of the give-and-take and seeing somebody succeed. I'm very comfortable being in that role.

RITCHIE: I think sometimes it's better not to know what you're in store for when you're going to get into a race.

JOHNSTON: If somebody said, "If there's anything that you'd like to do in the Senate before you pass on from the earth what would it be?" I thought it would be really fun to be appointed to a vacancy for about a year. I'd probably really enjoy that. I'd be a caretaker. I could really be a part of the club, enjoy it, get active, speak on the floor, do what I would really like to do, make those points I'd love to make. But I really don't have a desire to personally be on the ballot and run as a candidate.

RITCHIE: It does take a tremendous amount of stamina and a very thick skin.

JOHNSTON: It takes a lot of ego. I don't think I've got the ego to do it. My skin probably would be a little bit too thin. [laughs]

RITCHIE: You said when you were an editor you wrote very controversial editorials. Was that to be provocative to sell newspapers or did you really feel a need to sort of challenge the establishment?

JOHNSTON: Both. I had a populist upbringing that was typical for an Oklahoman, and I loved to challenge the establishment. In college, too--in fact, I got hauled before a college board meeting because I'd written a provocative editorial about the administration's lack of response to student needs. They pinned my ears back a little bit. They proved me wrong, but didn't deter me from getting out there and being hard charging. I found myself being very passionate about my politics.

One of the big issues, in fact, one of the things I'm kind of proud of, was that we had a small community in Henryetta that had no leash law for dogs. So I led this campaign in the newspaper to have a leash law in the community. I took on a couple of city council members for their lack of interest and for being too beholden to certain interests in the community. I got into some private altercations, not fisticuffs but just some shouting matches with them when they thought that I was being unfair. I thought, "No, wait a minute I'm calling it as I see it prove me wrong." It was really a lot of fun. I've mellowed in my older years. I don't like confrontations like I used to, but nonetheless I enjoyed that because I felt it was right, and it was fun.

RITCHIE: It also sold newspapers, I bet.

JOHNSTON: It sold newspapers. It made my boss very happy so that was a factor. But it was more of the result of doing things I thought, "Well, why are we doing this?" That's how I got started.

RITCHIE: You worked for an interesting group of people. You started off with Hammerschmidt who was established--he'd been in the House since the '60s--and then you moved to a freshman member. Hammerschmidt seems to me an old school Republican conservative, who didn't make huge waves, and who had a nice, safe district. He was able to beat Bill Clinton in 1974. Hiler was just the opposite.

JOHNSTON: Yes, that's right.

RITCHIE: Heads on, fight the establishment, much more a forerunner of what the House became in the 104th Congress.

JOHNSTON: That's correct.

RITCHIE: What did that do to you--going from one type of Republican to another? Did you find yourself growing intellectually in the process?

JOHNSTON: Yes, it was highly instructive. It was not always comfortable. Working for Hammerschmidt was not the best job I had in Washington. I adored the man. He gave me my start in Washington. He's a very nice person. But for all the reasons you just stated--I was as a young passionate political newcomer, in fact, I was still kind of growing in my political passions and interests. Working for him was very stilted. It was always frustrating for me to be pushing ideas and pushing concepts and trying to advocate and write for him, and always having it pared back all the time because it was too inflammatory. "We don't talk that way." "We don't use the word 'I.'" But it gave me some insights and a chance to study that kind of a political figure because there aren't as many of those as there used to be, but at the time that was the predominant kind of Republican member of Congress. But it just gave me some insights into the mind set that I found very useful in trying to understand people like his peers who were much the same way.

I was much happier, comfortable and enjoyed working for John Hiler. But I also gained, working for John Hiler, a higher respect for people like John Paul Hammerschmidt. Because Hammerschmidt, for his being an extremely cautious establishmentarian, I saw the benefit of moderation, of caution. We were a little aggressive in that freshman class of the 96th Congress and made some of the same mistakes as the 104th Congress made later. It was really interesting to watch some of those House members in the class of the 104th make the same mistakes we made back at the 96th Congress. Hiler became much more of a keep-your-nose-to-the-grindstone-and-work-hard Congressman. He became really a much better member after those first two years.

RITCHIE: He stood out. I remember him when he first came to the House. He was so against pork barrel that he voted against pork for his own district.

JOHNSTON: Made a point of it! It was quite a press challenge for me as well, because there was the mayor of South Bend, the largest city in the district, who wanted to build an ethanol plant using federal funds. Well, John Hiler thought that was just awful. There was no market for ethanol in the country at the time. It was just sheer pork. It made absolutely no sense economically. Here was the young businessman, conservative, [Milton] Friedman School of Economics at the University of Chicago's student saying, "Why are we doing this? It makes no sense." He advocated the free flow of capital. There were companies flying out of the district, moving from South Bend to South Carolina for lower labor rates to get away from unions. He was saying, "That's okay. It's not right to try to stop that. We just have to find ways to keep them here that don't involve federal mandates. Government shouldn't get involved in that."

He paid a price for that honesty. He never did recover from some of those things from a political standpoint in that area. He always lost South Bend by huge margins and it finally all caught up with him in 1990 when he lost his reelection that year. It was fun working for him because I was able to do a lot. We had a very young staff. He was the second youngest member in the House that year, but not the most rambunctious. John LeBoutillier was the youngest *and* the most rambunctious member of the House. [laughs]

RITCHIE: As a press secretary for a very controversial person who as a freshman member got national attention, you weren't trying to attract attention to the man. But were you trying, in a sense, to define him or to help him define himself?

JOHNSTON: It was a struggle because I had enough experience then to know that some things he was saying and doing were not playing real well back home. We were trying to carefully manage it. His most famous confrontation was probably in the White House when a lot of the freshmen members that year were hauled down to the White House in February before Reagan was shot in

that year, '81. Reagan felt obligated to pass a debt limit extension. Jack Hiler and a lot of the other freshmen that year had campaigned against debt for balanced budgets and didn't want to vote for that extension, especially as one of their first votes in the new Congress, after they'd been elected in this new political climate.

I recall that the Congressman got up to tell the President in the meeting that he just wasn't going to do that. It was not true to his conservative principles. That was a private meeting. The political director for the White House at that point was Lyn Nofziger. He had leaked a totally fictitious story that Reagan lectured this young congressman that he was active in conservative politics long before he was born. That was on national news that night. It never happened! I learned the power of a White House aide to be able to manipulate the press that effectively on something that *never* happened that way. It was quite educational.

RITCHIE: And there was almost no way he could fight back.

JOHNSTON: There was no way to fight back. There are just some things you just have to manage to do the best you can. You just flat out deny it and say that it really didn't happen that way and you try to give the truth but it didn't matter. [laughs] They had their story.

RITCHIE: So, how would you compare Kyl to Hammerschmidt and to Hiler?

JOHNSTON: Kyl was an interesting blend. Kyl came from establishment Arizona. He'd been President of the Chamber of Commerce for Phoenix and Maricopa County Arizona. He led campaigns to build roads. He followed the establishment path and was perceived to have been the moderate establishment politician, when, in fact, he was very conservative, and also intellectual. Neither Hiler nor Hammerschmidt, although both were very bright men in their own ways--Hiler was very strong economically--Kyl was a real intellectual. I mean he is a bright, brilliant man with very strongly held conservative views. His father had been a House member for years from Iowa and I found Kyl to be more ideological and a lot more focused on "doing the right thing." I thought he'd be more of the Hammerschmidt mold, would just take care of his district do things

for his state. I had learned after my Hiler experience to appreciate just taking care of the district and that wasn't the approach he was going to take.

End of the First Interview

FROM THE HOUSE TO THE SENATE

Interview #2

Wednesday, December 11, 1996

RITCHIE: When we stopped the other day you had just started to work for Jon Kyl and that was in 1987 when he was in the House.

JOHNSTON: He'd just been elected to the House. His first race for public office, basically.

RITCHIE: And you were his administrative assistant.

JOHNSTON: That's correct.

RITCHIE: So you came back in a different capacity. Before you'd been press secretary to two congressmen. What did it entail to become an administrative assistant?

JOHNSTON: It was interesting because when I first came to Washington and first got on Congressman Hammerschmidt's staff, I was twenty-three, twenty-four years old and my immediate goal was to become a chief of staff for a House member. That's what I thought I was going to aspire to on Capitol Hill and that would be just the greatest job in the world. It would pay decently and I would have a chance to really be in charge of something and support a member. Well, by the time I turned thirty I'd reached it. What happened was, having worked at the Campaign Committee as a field manager, I had built a relationship with a lot of candidates. And Jon Kyl and I just hit it off wonderfully, early in the process when few people thought he was going to win.

His election was something of a surprise. He was in a race to succeed a retiring member, Eldon Rudd. A former congressman, Rudd's predecessor, John Conlan was running and all the surveys suggested that Conlan still had high name recognition. He had vacated the seat in 1976 when he lost a Senate primary to succeed Senator Paul Fannin. Of course, Senator [Dennis] DeConcini won that

race, largely based on a contentious GOP primary. So, Conlan while he still had some name ID familiarity, he also carried some baggage. And Jon Kyl was able to build some pretty strong financial support. He raised over a million dollars and just clobbered poor John Conlan. After he won, Jon Kyl called me during Thanksgiving at my parents house in North Carolina, saying that he really wanted somebody that he trusted who knew Washington and would I help get him up and running. I said that would be great. Ironically, I'd already planned to take a vacation in his district without even knowing I'd be working for him, so it turned into a transition period and I got off to an early start with him.

Being a political animal, the thing that I wanted to do with Jon Kyl was to maximize the advantage of incumbency--I was not shy about it--to make sure that Jon Kyl got off to a good start. My objectives were: he would face no serious opposition for reelection; we'd maximize the levers of incumbency; and we would be the best freshman office on Capitol Hill. We hired, recruited, and organized our staff from day one, walked in with a full staff, ready to go to work. Probably the most poignant moment and probably one of the most interesting experiences was the way the House members select their offices. They do it by lottery by class, and so the freshman class of course is the last group to do the lottery. There were, I think, fifty-four members of that class. It was a pretty good size class as I remember. Jon Kyl was very fixated on getting decent office space so I felt under *enormous* pressure. He sent me to do the lottery, when usually the member does it. And how I breathed a sigh of relief when we drew number three! The third best number in that freshman class.

RITCHIE: Do you reach into a bag or something?

JOHNSTON: You reach into a box and you pull out a button with a number on it. I pulled out number three and there just happened to be three nice offices in the Cannon [House Office Building] below the top floor, which is considered prime real estate for a freshman member. We got good office space. We were all together. A lot of freshman House members are spread all over the Capitol. In John Hiler's case, we drew the next to last number so we had space on the third floor of Longworth but also an annex on the fifth floor, with slow

elevators and two flights of stairs. It was just a pain. So it's nice to be all together, and in Jon Kyl's case it was great.

I thought Jon Kyl would be more of a traditional kind of House member, take care of his district and focus on local issues. He surprised me. He proved he really wanted to go-- even though he had a background as a lawyer specializing in federal issues, water reclamation, public lands issues--into defense and national security. So, he proved to be quite a challenge for me and really brought me back to focus more on policy and less on politics. Although *he* was able to free up on policy because I was largely taking care of the politics for him. He wound up with no Democratic opposition, no primary opposition, so it was quite successful. It was quite a tenure for me. We worked very hard. It was wonderful to aspire to something and then to get there and have it turn out well. It was a good experience.

RITCHIE: Did you also handle press relations for him?

JOHNSTON: Yes, I did some. The one frustrating aspect was that he, having been editor of a law review in college, was a very picky editor. He was hard to satisfy. Somehow I managed to write in a way he liked. We went through, during the two and a half years I was with him, three press secretaries. He was never quite satisfied with the press secretaries' work, so I wound up having to do a lot of the media relations work, especially with the editorial writers and the Capitol press corps. So, yes, I did handle more press relations than I thought I was going to for him.

RITCHIE: On the House side, what's a typical day like for an administrative assistant? When would you get to work?

JOHNSTON: I arrived very early, because Jon Kyl was an early riser. So I made a point of being the first person in the office each morning. I did not want Jon Kyl arriving first, so I was usually there between 7:15 and 7:30 every morning. Basically, the thing I remember most was just the incredible amount of paper that came through a House office. I'm sure Senate offices are no different but they just have more people to process it. I spent a good chunk of my day just

going through the inbox. Usually the day was getting there ahead of schedule and trying to anticipate in about fifteen minutes what Jon Kyl would want or need when he walked in the door.

The key part was just being there because his mind was always working, like a lot of very bright members' minds do. He always barreled into the office having just thought of fifteen things that had to get done that day or even that minute. So he'd walk in and he'd rattle off the four or five things he needed to see done or he wanted to have done or was concerned about, and that pretty much dominated what happened that day or that week for me. He usually was in there Monday through Thursday. He did not work the usual Tuesday-Thursday routine that most House members seem to work. He would fly to Arizona Thursday evening and would fly back on Sunday. Thus it was a very short weekend in Arizona and he would be in the office on Monday all the way through Thursday. Friday was kind of catch-up day and usually it was just a case of just keeping on top of the work.

Jon Kyl really focused a lot on the correspondence, the mail system. House offices sometimes get driven by mail and that was a big frustration. We'd get on average in a House office in those days five hundred pieces a week. You have a staff in D.C. of seven or eight people to handle all this so a big chunk of my day was also handling all of the correspondence that didn't fall with anybody else and to be on top constantly of the mail load. We had some staffers that could turn mail over in three days, some that took three weeks, and some that took longer, unfortunately. So a large part of our day was making sure that he was satisfied. But he was also very hard to satisfy on letter drafts. He constantly was editing. He'd say: "This letter's grammar is bad. This word is wrong. It's not my style. It didn't answer the question." He would also read the correspondence. He signed every letter that went out of the office that was in response to a personal letter. We also responded to anything that was mass generated--he didn't read those just because we had a machine respond to them. But he not only read the response, he'd read the letter, and if he felt the letter wasn't being answered, he made us redo it over again. That was constant. It got to be very frustrating just trying to satisfy him on the quality of mail. He really

cared about that kind of correspondence. Most members don't, but he did, and that was a *huge* part of that two-year period.

RITCHIE: Did you keep in touch with other administrative assistants?

JOHNSTON: Yes, one thing we did back in my John Hiler days is that we had a network within the freshman class of AA's and press secretaries, who kind of shared ideas and shared observations. The funny thing about freshmen members, especially on the House side, is that often times there's a natural competition as to who's got the best operation, who answers the mail most quickly. And they lie to each other! [laughs] One member would say to Jon Kyl, "Well, I answer my mail in three days." So Jon Kyl would say to me, "Why is so-and-so able to answer his mail in three days and we take three weeks?" So I went to the AA who I knew and said, "What's the real story here?" And he said, "Oh, we're four weeks behind." They just would lie to each other. So a lot of my process, having been through a freshman office before, was just letting Jon Kyl know that we were doing just fine that we were ahead of the curve. We were doing above average. Yes, we're going to have frustrations but don't believe all you hear. So we all would network because they all lied to each other to some degree just to show who had the better office.

I know in the most recent freshman class for the 104th Congress their AA's met on a weekly basis. It happens on the House side, too. It's just a way of networking and staying on top of stuff. Also on the House side, unlike the Senate, there's no power in being a single House member. You gained your strength by numbers. So House members look for ways to join groups and be part of coalitions where their influence can be spread across maybe half a dozen or more members. So, yes we would do networking.

RITCHIE: I wondered, considering that everybody faces the same problems, if they don't share ways and techniques of doing things, especially about new equipment, or if you had an office that was a model office that you might have kept an eye on? I have a feeling there is probably more of that kind of networking on the House side than on the Senate side.

JOHNSTON: Yes there is because what really drives the House much more than the Senate is the schedule. A House member sees a two-year cycle where a senator sees a six-year term. That's why House members tend to be more frantic, more focused on getting things

done more quickly, because they just don't have the time to do what they really want to do, and because political pressures are much more severe over there than they are here in the Senate.

RITCHIE: Talking about political pressures, that was a particularly political time in the House because the Speaker from Texas. . .

JOHNSTON: Jim Wright.

RITCHIE: Got in trouble and everything had gotten highly charged at that point.

JOHNSTON: It was tough for us. There were two things going on. It was a very intense time. You had the problems not only of Speaker Wright but also Tony Coelho going on. In fact, I was on my one vacation during that two and a half year period, in Europe of all places, when Speaker Wright resigned and Coelho announced he was going to step down. It all happened, I think, in the spring of 1988. In addition, back in Arizona we had a Governor named Evan Mecham who was in the process of being impeached. So we not only had the political pressure back home of seeing the whole Republican coalition fracturing over this very divisive, very conservative, and eventually impeached Governor, but you also had the upheavals in the House led by Newt Gingrich. Jon Kyl was very much a disciple of Newt Gingrich.

In fact, Congressman Gingrich's primary vehicle for spreading his gospel was something called the Conservative Opportunity Society, or COS for short. Jon Kyl was an active and loyal participant in those sessions. In fact, I would go with him to those every Wednesday morning eight o'clock sessions. Jon Kyl was so active and so impressed both Newt Gingrich and Bob Walker, the Chair, that in his second year in the House he was made chairman of COS, in 1988. That also consumed an enormous amount of time because we controlled the agenda. We had twenty to thirty active members, the most conservative junior members

of the House. Newt still played the role of a professor who came in usually late in the meeting and would listen, not say a word, for fifteen to twenty minutes and suddenly say: "All right, here's what we need to do." It was really stunning to watch Gingrich perform in that format because it showed his brilliance, his ability to strategize, his ability to communicate. So his ascension up the ranks was no surprise to me at all.

RITCHIE: That seemed like a polarizing period.

JOHNSTON: Very much so.

RITCHIE: On one hand you have Wright who was trying to put his stamp on the House and was a somewhat authoritarian Speaker.

JOHNSTON: Very authoritarian.

RITCHIE: And then you have Gingrich who was also trying to put his stamp not only on the House but on his own party, trying to change the direction of the party and reenergize it. That period seems to be a prelude to everything that has happened since, more so I think than when Tip O'Neill was the Speaker. I'm not sure if you'd agree with that, but. . .

JOHNSTON: Oh, I think that's true. It was quite a time of upheaval. You had a lot of things going on in the capital. You had [Ronald] Reagan's last two years in office, you had Iran-Contra going on, and the stock market dropped five hundred points that one day in October of '87. You had economic fissures. And you had people running for president all over the place that year. That was really quite a tumultuous Congress. And we had Bob Dole, a new Minority Leader, having been Majority Leader, who was running for president. You had a Vice President running for president in George Bush. It was quite a time.

RITCHIE: How do national politics affect an individual member's office?

JOHNSTON: Mostly in '88, with so many people running in an open Republican primary, George Bush, Bob Dole, and I can't recall who all else also ran--those were the two titans that were running at the time. Arizona, of course, had a primary and so you look for influential members to try to be supportive. Jon Kyl purposely

chose to be neutral, and I chose as a result of his neutrality to have a foot in every camp, so we would be in a position to be helpful to whoever emerged the eventual frontrunner.

Jon Kyl's campaign chairman when he first ran was the Bush Chairman for Arizona, former Mayor Margaret Hance, so when Bush emerged as the eventual nominee, we had a wonderful relationship. I played quite a role since Jon Kyl--and more me than him--became the liaison between people who wanted to work in the administration after Bush won and the Bush administration personnel team. That's a job I'll never do again because I got hundreds of phone calls a day from job seekers from Arizona. It was very disruptive for me in early '89, very frustrating. I left in May not having really completed the job because the Bush people took their time getting staffed up. It was just people calling every day asking had I heard anything. Well, of course, I wasn't hearing anything, I was one of fifty people. It was neat playing that role for a while but then it got very old. I'll never do it again.

RITCHIE: I guess for everyone that you make happy, you must make a lot of other people very unhappy.

JOHNSTON: Yes, because people always think you know something. Then when they realize you don't, then they get mad at you: "Why aren't you a bigger player?" It's a fault I still have to this day where I just raised the stakes a little too high and it turned out to be a very thankless task.

RITCHIE: Your experiences up to that point had been alternating between elections and administration, being in the office of a member and being out on the campaign trail. Which did you enjoy the more?

JOHNSTON: I can't rate one over the other. Both were important and essential. It was good to be able to go back and forth because being on the Hill and doing policy and doing management helped make me a better political operative and vice versa. They both were very complementary. I didn't really

plan it to be that way, it just kind of worked out that way. I'd been successful enough in the campaign arena that I had people who wanted me to work in campaigns. Conversely, I was successful enough as a Capitol Hill manager/advisor that I was always being pulled back to the Hill. I never really applied for anything that I got. It all just kind of came my way. Jon Kyl came to me and said, "I want you to come work for me." Conversely, in 1989, in April of '89, I was approached by Senator [Don] Nickles' people about going to the [Republican] Senatorial [Campaign] Committee on this side.

I never had any desire to work in the Senate. I loved the House and saw the Senate as a foreign world. I never really had a relationship with Don Nickles but knew the people he was bringing on to manage the Campaign Committee. What attracted me was that I knew the people I'd be working for; there was an Oklahoma connection that was very comfortable for me, and it paid pretty well. Jon Kyl had one major fault: he didn't pay well. I mean, he just did not want to pay well, and frankly I kind of supported that because we were trying to save money and hire more people. So the dollars looked pretty good at the Senatorial Committee. I know Jon Kyl was not happy when I made the decision to go. He was comfortable with me in that role and now he had to go off and find somebody else to be his top staff aide. But again, that was a case where they came to me and they recruited me to go to the Senatorial Committee.

RITCHIE: At that point you were married and were starting a family.

JOHNSTON: Yes, it was very stressful. In fact, my wife became pregnant shortly after about the same time I made the decision to go work for the Senatorial Committee. So it was all very stressful, changing jobs, becoming a father for the first time, all happening at once.

RITCHIE: I was wondering also about the problems of keeping a personal life when you've got a job that requires you to be there early in the morning and work pretty late at night.

JOHNSTON: Yes, the closest I ever came to burning out was working for Jon Kyl. He was wonderful to work for. It was a great experience. I would do

it again but he's a very demanding individual. I was a very demanding individual on myself as he is on himself. You get caught in a frenzy and I'm glad I left when I did because I think I would have suffered had I stayed. It was causing a lot of stress in my family because I was working a steady sixty to eighty hour week. I was going to Arizona once a month and I was putting in a pretty long day trying to just stay ahead of the curve and be successful.

In the Senatorial Committee, Senator Nickles in his own way was a very demanding member but had a very different style of operating than Jon Kyl. That's by no means to criticize Kyl, but Nickles was much more family-friendly in his environment than Jon Kyl was. Well, Jon Kyl's kids were grown. They were gone. Don Nickles still had young kids at home and still does today. I think that had some influence on Nickles' style, which is a little different. The atmosphere and the culture was a little different. Even though it was a Campaign Committee, it was more conducive, it was a little bit of a break. We were going at eighty miles per hour versus one hundred miles an hour as I was for Jon Kyl. So, it all worked out very nicely for me.

RITCHIE: Whenever I go over to the House side, I'm always struck by how young everybody is. I have a feeling it's not the kind of career that you can persist in for very long or else you don't really have a private life.

JOHNSTON: Well, the Congressional Management Foundation has done studies that show that the average House tenure for personal staff is actually declining. It's gone from about two and a half years to eighteen months. People just don't stay in the House a long time. There are exceptions and it depends on the member, and the relationship, and the safety of the seat, the pressures. I have friends on the House side who have been there for nearly twenty years and wouldn't consider being anywhere else. But they also work for members who are in safer seats. There's a pattern, there's a comfort level, and they manage to work it out where they can have some flexibility and a personal life. It's important to do that. It's hard sometimes. Some members just drive their staff to work really hard and they have turnover. There are a lot of members on the House side who have large alumni associations. But a lot of people will tell you that they'd do it again, too, because it was a great experience, and they learned a great deal, and

it made them a better employee. That's the case with Jon Kyl, or Jack Hiler, or John Paul Hammerschmidt. I would do all three all over again.

RITCHIE: Well, you came to the Senate side originally through the Republican Campaign Committee. What were your responsibilities with the Campaign Committee?

JOHNSTON: Senator Nickles set up his political operation with three deputy political directors, which was my title. It was by geographic regions. They gave me the southern region, and what they liked about me for that position was the southern races in that cycle were predominately incumbent campaigns. It was Jesse Helms; it was Strom Thurmond; it was John Warner. It was a mostly incumbent area, and having helped incumbents when I worked for the House Campaign Committee--that's what my primary job was, to help House incumbents--I had a history of working with incumbents even though they weren't Senate races. So my job primarily was to build relationships with all those members. It took a while.

I discovered it's a little more difficult to build relationships not just with senators but a senator's own infrastructure than it was on the House side. The House side is more open. People are always looking to build friendships and alliances. On this side they're a little more protective. It's kind of like the Chinese, you just have to take some time and build that relationship in the Senate where the House side they come and they go. [snaps fingers] It took a while, and it was a little frustrating but eventually I did and because the Senate Campaign Committee provides an enormous amount of resources for a Senate campaign, millions of dollars in some cases depending on the size of the state. There was a reason for them to want to work with me, and in most cases I did very well.

I had one interesting case where Senator [Thad] Cochran was up for re-election. I walked in to see his chief of staff who's a very good friend of mine to this day and he said, "We don't want you going to our state. We had a bad experience with the Committee six years ago in our last re-election race and we don't want you going in. If we need you, we'll call you." I said, "Yes, sir." [laughs] Fortunately, he had no opposition. Senator Cochran was totally

unopposed that year so there wasn't any need for me to go into the state. But that sometimes is the response that you get based on what your predecessors had done in prior races.

I got to meet a lot of people. I travelled quite a bit so I got to go into states I'd never worked in before, like South Carolina and North Carolina. The senator I probably worked most closely with was John Warner, even though he didn't have a serious re-election campaign. But he took it seriously and was very accessible to me and I gained a lot of respect for him personally. Eventually they also gave me a couple of other states. They gave me South Dakota and Nebraska, so I got to work with Senator [Larry] Pressler pretty closely. His 1990 race was very close. Then they gave me a challenger race. Senator [James] Exon was being challenged by Hal Daub, a former congressman, and I was involved in that race, although it was not successful. Primarily, all the incumbents I worked with were re-elected, and that was my primary responsibility.

RITCHIE: What kinds of things would you do for them? Would you assess their situation?

JOHNSTON: Basically, my job as a field person was to do three primary responsibilities. One, was to gather intelligence about the political environment in the state for the chairman and for the management of the Senatorial Committee. Number two was to coordinate the way the Committee's money was spent to support those campaigns. And thirdly it was to work with other political parties, state parties, national party, to coordinate other efforts of the Republican party to support that candidate's re-election or that candidate's election. That was primarily what I did. It required travel to most of the states, travelling where possible with the senator or with the staff, going in, meeting with state party officials, and then drawing up plans. I was best known, unlike most political operatives, as a consummate planner. I was constantly trying to negotiate coordinated plans between the national party, state parties, and my committee on how various get-out-the-vote and other advocacy programs were designed and carried out. Again, it was primarily a management function but one I really, really enjoyed.

RITCHIE: Were you involved in advertising for campaigns?

JOHNSTON: Yes, mostly in direct mail not television advertising. Television advertising, I discovered, in Senate races is very personal. Members get personally involved in their television advertising because they realize that's how most voters get their information. Seventy percent of voters get their information from television. Radio is climbing but it's still second place to television. So they really got personally involved in how they were portrayed, what ads they ran, and such. Most of my involvement, where I really could influence advertising, was in a direct mail area where most of our money went. Actually, we encouraged it because if people used our money for direct mail, they got a lower postage rate in most cases because we were paying for the mailing at nonprofit rates. Not seeing it or not sharing the perception that I had of direct mail as a powerful tool, they let me go ahead and play a role there so I did in that case. Other than that, that was pretty much it.

RITCHIE: The Republican party got into direct mailing much earlier than did the Democratic party.

JOHNSTON: Yes, they did.

RITCHIE: It's just amazing to me how the operation works. The only campaign that I ever volunteered for was John Lindsay's campaign for Mayor of New York in 1965. Then I went away to graduate school and for years afterwards I can't tell you how much mail came to my parents' address in New York from various Republican committees because my name got on their mailing lists. I was both impressed and overwhelmed by how much would accumulate. I'd come home on holidays and my parents would have saved what had arrived in between. I never got the sense that the Democrats used direct mailing to the degree that the Republicans did. Republicans almost made a science out of it.

JOHNSTON: Actually it depends on where you're at. If you go to the more expensive media markets, California, was kind of the birth place for political direct mail. It's still the most dominant form of communication in California because it's so expensive to run advertising on television. And it's true of New York and Philadelphia as well. That's why you see states like New Jersey which has one TV station, but you're sandwiched between New York and Philadelphia, the most and fourth-

most media markets in the country. That's where you see direct mail because direct mail is the most efficient means of communicating. It's not the most powerful, TV is the most powerful, but direct mail is especially effective for down ballot races, Congress and for state races, is the predominant form of communication in those kinds of areas. Less so in a state like Idaho or Oklahoma where TV is relatively inexpensive.

RITCHIE: Especially because TV reaches everybody, but not everybody's going to vote. The big question in every election is who is going to show up? Whose supporters will come out? Only about forty-eight percent of the voters came out in 1996 and only thirty-seven percent showed up in 1994, so you really have to get the faithful out and focus their attention on the election.

JOHNSTON: That's why a lot of direct mail is delivered late in an election because it's designed not just to persuade last-minute undecided voters but it's also designed to generate some turnout. In the case of Senator Pressler's race, for example, the Senatorial Committee used bulk mail--federal law permits a national party committee to help a state party do candidate-specific mailings or candidate-specific activities, just so long as volunteers are involved and it not be considered a contribution to the campaign. It's kind of a legal convolution but one of the responsibilities I had was to use that mechanism of the law to go beyond what we could normally do directly for a campaign if a state party's involved.

For example, I took \$125,000 into South Dakota late in 1990 to help Senator Pressler in a very tight race. It was money above and beyond what our legal limits were but because we used volunteers it was permissible as a "party building" activity. We would basically replace--we'd give the state party money for it to operate and then it would use its dollars from its federal account to underwrite these programs. Now, as long as volunteers were involved in a significant way, it was all considered nonallicable. It was not a contribution, so we were able to generate several hundred thousand pieces of mail the last month of that race, and he won with fifty-two percent.

RITCHIE: Did you use phone banks and things like that as well?

JOHNSTON: Yes, phone banks were big too. In fact, that was always the most difficult part of the process because the state party, the national party, the Campaign Committee, and the candidate have to come up with a coordinated plan on how dollars will be used for party activities. Everybody was always worried about being rolled or screwed by somebody else and that nobody had to carry an unequal burden of expense. That's why I thought I could negotiate Middle East peace plans. It was that difficult sometimes to come to agreement on how money would be used. One of the most expensive but one of the most important elements was how we would do the phoning, which races would you call to identify voters.

A typical phone bank would do two things. One, it would call voters that you believed were undecided and asked them who they were for. You had to allocate the cost of that phone call based on who you were calling for, whether it was a governors race or Senate race. The party would underwrite a small part of it as law would permit. Then you would do get-out-the-vote calls. It costs on average about fifty to sixty cents per completed call, to reach that undecided voter, to survey them, or to turn them out. When you're calling tens of thousands of voters it can be very expensive, but it is very effective. Studies have shown that the combination of a last-minute mail piece and a phone call on a Saturday can generate thousands of additional voters who otherwise would not vote.

RITCHIE: Who are sort of at sea because they've seen so many ads and there are so many candidates. You need something to catch their attention.

JOHNSTON: That's correct. Studies show, too, that most voters even today don't make up their minds, truly make a decision in a race, until the last two or three weeks of a campaign. They may tell a pollster in September: yeah, I'm for John Warner or I'm for Mark Warner. But that's usually based on the last thing they've seen or heard. Those numbers do change and people tend not to make a final decision until those last two or three weeks. That's why you see the most dollars spent on campaign activity are spent during that time in most cases.

RITCHIE: Would you also advise the senator's own campaign staff if they were getting off track?

JOHNSTON: Yes, I played an advisory role. I'd go in and often times they'd ask me, "Well, how are we doing compared to somebody else?" For example, Senator Helms' campaign would say, "Well, what are you doing in South Carolina? What are you doing in Nebraska? What is somebody else doing that we're not doing that maybe we should." What you carried was the efforts of other campaigns. So they would get intelligence from me of what others were doing.

For example, Hal Daub was mailing a video which is an expensive but a very novel way of campaigning in a state like Nebraska, where people are spread out. But they all have VCR's, ironically, in Nebraska. We'd talk about how that would do in North Carolina and where it might work, who it might go to and what the cost might be. Often times they would also seek information from me about various vendors. Who was the best person to hire to do our phone banking? Who was the best mail vendor to use? What were their costs like? How's their creativity? I often got involved in the polling because it also is very expensive and we sometimes would underwrite the cost so we also would get the information how the candidate was doing. It's a huge expense in most campaign committees and most candidates are happy to have us do that. All it costs them is sharing very sensitive data with us, which helped us know what was really going on. So we did a tremendous amount of polling for candidates and those are some of the areas where we can be helpful.

RITCHIE: Now, you were working mostly for incumbents. House incumbents get re-elected in a much larger percentage than Senate incumbents. I've heard from Senate staff that a lot changes in a state in the six years between elections.

JOHNSTON: It sure does.

RITCHIE: And it's sometimes easy for incumbent senators to lose track of who's who and what's going on. Did you have to get incumbents up to speed to face a new election?

JOHNSTON: Yes, it struck me that House members never really truly leave being in "campaign mode." They're always politically attuned to what's going on. They go back more frequently. They hustle more. A senator, I noticed, and mostly his staff, would just get totally isolated from the political culture and have to really get in the campaign mode. Every member is different. Some members are more politically attuned than others. Don Nickles, for example, is very politically savvy. Trent Lott is very politically savvy. They always keep an eye on what's going on back home. Some members--I'm not going to name any names--just have to get back into it again. I noticed that with a lot of the ones I worked for. They just had to gear up, because one thing you have to do is you have to go home in a campaign. People expect to see you if you want to get re-elected and if a member is used to going back once a month, it's hard to get them to shift their machinery to go back two or three or four times a month.

Also a Senate office, unlike a House office, doesn't respond as quickly to things that develop as a House office does. A House office, if they saw a bad news story that morning, they'd have a response out by noon. A Senate office might take a while, one, to discover a bad story but, number two, to respond to it, or decide whether even to respond to it. You tend to get politically desensitized to things. So, a part of my process was creating a sense of urgency in offices and with staff. Senate staff also are much less politically attuned to things back in the state than House members' staffs are. A lot of my time was spent trying to motivate and again give that sense of urgency to a Senate staffer. "You better pay attention to what's going on. This is something you've got to respond to, this is something you got to watch out for." In addition we also did a lot of research on a Senate incumbent as if we were the opposition so they would know what to anticipate was going to happen to them. Again, House members do that almost automatically. It's the way their mind set is. Senators you kind of have to walk them through it. It's like they've left a world and then

have to go back to it again. It's a hard transition to have to kind of shift back for a Senate office. Six years is a long time.

RITCHIE: Especially some of the older members find that their key supporters are retired by the time their election comes around again.

JOHNSTON: Now that is a problem for both House and Senate incumbents. I noticed that working for Jack Hiler of Indiana. He had a huge staff infrastructure in 1980 when he first won. There is always more excitement for a new candidate than there is for an incumbent and it's hard to get people motivated to keep somebody in office versus trying to change something. Senators really suffer because they don't do political mailings, don't do political fundraisers for many years. There's sometimes a four-year gap between doing political events or even attending political events in their state. A lot happens in a six-year period. A lot happens in a two-year period, too, for House guys, but in the senators' case, they sometimes have to start from scratch all over again. It's not easy.

RITCHIE: Well, you have a good track record. That was 1990 and almost everybody you worked for, all the incumbents, were re-elected.

JOHNSTON: That's correct.

RITCHIE: What does somebody working for a campaign committee do when the campaign is over?

JOHNSTON: They have to find another job, especially if there's a new chairman. Senator Phil Gramm of Texas was elected to replace Senator Nickles. Senator Nickles and I had built a pretty good relationship. We had done some travelling together. He was a very hands on chairman. He would go in to recruit with me. For example, in Tennessee, Al Gore was up in 1990. We wanted to have someone to run against Al Gore. I brought Senator Nickles in with me to Tennessee to try to recruit people to run for office. We were not successful by the way.

RITCHIE: How would you recruit somebody in a state like Tennessee?

JOHNSTON: It's hard. Tennessee was hard because our objective was to help George Bush. We thought Al Gore would be (and this is more my view than anybody else's) a factor and maybe even be the nominee against George Bush in 1992. We thought, based on our survey and research that it was possible. And if you don't challenge Al Gore then he'd be out campaigning for other candidates. So our objective was not so much to defeat him as it was to keep him home. It's hard to convince someone to run as a "sacrificial lamb" when your objective is not necessarily to win. But we thought there was enough potential that if we found the right person who maybe aspired to running, say, four or six years later, to get that first race out of the way, to build that political infrastructure, to run and get a race under the belt and then be ready to run again in say two, four, six years down the road either for the House or for the Senate again. So, we approached the race that way. Don Nickles, of course, approached it that anybody could win, using his own example of somebody who was never suppose to be even taken seriously who won a race.

I would go in and say: "We have these resources. We think you'd be a good candidate. If you run and if you do as well as we think you will do, then we'll be here with the money." And that was always the sticking point. They often times would say, "I want the money guaranteed up front before I decide to run." Well, we wouldn't do that. So we'd often say, "Look, we'll put in some money but we're going to reserve the right to give you full funding based on how well you do." That's sometimes is the breaking point. If they were going to run, they had to be serious. If they didn't want to take that risk, they probably wouldn't be a good candidate. So in a way that was a nice filter, as it were, it was a nice hurdle for them to have to overcome.

If we really wanted somebody to run but we didn't necessarily want to commit the resources early on, then I'd bring in Don Nickles, and sometimes that could be very persuasive when a U.S. senator, a member of the leadership says, "Hey, we think you should be a candidate. I want you to be a colleague of mine in Washington." That sometimes helped. Recruiting was never a bigger problem in the Senate as it was for the House. The House is a big problem recruitingwise.

Senate races, because they are more visible, tend to attract people much more than a House race. That's why you have a lower retention rate in the Senate because you get better quality people running for the Senate than you do sometimes for the House. That's changed a lot.

RITCHIE: How would you identify somebody to recruit?

JOHNSTON: Well, you tended to look for somebody that you thought would want to be a senator. I looked for people that I thought either had an ability to attract a lot of support or, in all candor, we would look for somebody who had a lot of personal money on their own, who was involved politically. We would look for somebody who had some stature; somebody who had political ability; somebody we thought would be a strongly motivated candidate for office.

A good example of somebody we looked at and identified in Tennessee was Ted Welch. Ted Welch is a very successful businessman, former chairman of the state party, a Republican National Committeeman, personally quite wealthy. Don Nickles went to Ted and said, "I think you should run for office." We'd also tried to communicate with Lamar Alexander at the time. He was head of the University of Tennessee and he said, "No way." He made it very clear that it was not in his plan to a U.S. senator or to challenge Al Gore at that time. That may change in year 2000 but that was the plan back then.

Part of the agenda, too, was we wanted to be able to brag about a candidate. If we could get a Big Name into the race that was just great. Former governors or House members were very attractive to Don Nickles. Or an independently wealthy, respected businessperson who had some personal resources was also very attractive. Those were the primary paradigms of the person we would look for in a state. Otherwise, to get somebody who wasn't known, didn't have the resources, didn't have the stature, was always a hard sell. We wanted to be able to recruit a candidate we could go back here and pitch the PAC community or others, "Hey this person could win this race." It's hard to do with a No Name person. So for a Senate race you tended to try to find somebody, really, who had some ability.

RITCHIE: And I suppose it's kind of heady to have the Campaign Committee come down, sit down, and stare across the table at you, especially if you've got a senator along with you.

JOHNSTON: Yes, it is! [laughs]

RITCHIE: Now, there are different shades of Republicans. Did it make much difference, if you were going into a state, where the person would stand on the issues?

JOHNSTON: Yes, it depended on the issue. I was more policy focused than your average political operative because I knew that candidates define themselves and are defined by how they handle issues; not so much the positions they take but how they handle them. A good story is in 1992, I might be getting a little bit ahead of you here, but when I was at the Policy Committee I would often times avail myself to the Senatorial Committee or Senator Gramm to go in and help brief a candidate on issues. Often times my role was not to tell them what to say but to give them enough background but also to tell them based on their position how to communicate it. I would occasionally, though I am personally very strongly pro-life, communicate to somebody how to express a pro-choice position to be politically effective, because I was putting on my Republican hat and not my policy hat at the time.

It was not unusual to go in and tell somebody, even somebody whom I disagreed with on the issue, how to communicate it to win. I would look for somebody who had a nice issue that they would like bring to a race. If somebody for example had a tragedy in their life, I'd wonder how that would play. Would that be a plus or a negative? You had to handle this very carefully. You didn't want to try to capitalize on somebody's personal tragedy, but if somebody had been a "victim of crime," well, guess what that does for you in a campaign? It gives you the crime issue. What greater authority is there than somebody who's suffered at the hands of a criminal? So, if somebody had had that kind of personal experience, that to me was a positive.

I would look for those kinds of hooks, as we call them, to an issue, that would make an even more effective candidate and allow them to build a campaign around this key issue that would attract voters. Issues were a lot more important to me than they were the average political operative because I knew ultimately voters in deciding who to be for would look for a similarity on issues. They look for things like passion, they look for intensity, they look for some commonality without ever having to agree necessarily. That was more important. That's why Bill Clinton's so successful.

RITCHIE: But in some states, if you're on the wrong side of an issue, the campaign's going to be swimming up stream the whole time.

JOHNSTON: I did look carefully, especially when recruiting somebody who's in the legislature, at their voting record. If they had a history of voting for a lot of tax increases, I tended to shy away because that is a death sentence in a primary. Really, I found that issues never were really an obstacle even if somebody was pro-choice, pro-life. That never got to be a big problem.

RITCHIE: Many politicians change their minds, but it takes a good politician to explain why he changed his mind.

JOHNSTON: That's correct. I looked more for the ability to communicate than I did where they stood on a certain issue. I didn't want to mess with candidates on issues. I had great respect, again more than most political operatives, for where somebody is coming from, because I understood having worked on the Hill that, hey, this is a personal decision and you were a representative of the voters. I'm not going to tell you how to think on an issue. You can think for yourself, but I am going to help you communicate it. I took that role as a political operative. I never really tried to change anybody's position, although I did have a lot of candidates, especially for the House, who asked me, who were maybe undecided, what I would do. How does so and so think? How does Newt Gingrich think on this issue? How does Bob Dole think on this issue? Where are they on this matter? How do they explain it? I would tend to influence their positions in that way if they were undecided or still looking for a particular position. Issues in terms of recruiting a candidate, they

were more factors to be dealt with or to be capitalized on than they were used to determine whether somebody actually would run on.

RITCHIE: Did you notice any change in the Campaign Committee between when Nickles was chairman and when Gramm was chairman? Did they have different strategies?

JOHNSTON: Yes, they operated differently. The worst kept secret in town was that Phil Gramm was running for president. He narrowly won the chairmanship both times because people knew that he had national ambitions. Phil Gramm certainly was very aggressive and much more so than Don Nickles was in reaching out to organizations that clearly could be helpful in a national campaign. He spent a lot of time in New Hampshire, a lot of time in Iowa. I'm sure there was a reason for that. [laughs] He denied it and would deny it now that he used the Campaign Committee to advance his national campaign. I sense that Gramm was much more aggressive in building those kinds of alliances that were more of a national scope than they were a candidate specific scope.

Nickles tended to focus more on things that would help candidates. Gramm was looking for, it appeared to me, a bigger picture. He would work with an organization and do things that would help a variety of candidates versus just one or two. Nickles was a little more retail than Phil Gramm was in that respect. Other than that both of them were aggressive. Gramm was an aggressive fundraiser as was Nickles. Gramm inherited a debt from Nickles in the 1990 race so he had to focus more on fundraising. The 1992 cycle was a much more expensive election cycle. We had the luxury in '90 of having not a single big state Senate race. No California, no Texas, no Florida or New York. Where for Phil Gramm, in '92, all those states I just mentioned had a Senate race. Well, that's five million dollars right there that you had to raise that you didn't have to raise in the previous cycle. So Phil Gramm was probably a much more aggressive fundraiser as a result than Don Nickles. Actually they were pretty similar in style both young, aggressive, conservative members that really were pretty competitive people.

RITCHIE: I was thinking when you said it that it's probably better to leave a deficit in the treasury than a deficit in the elections.

JOHNSTON: That's right.

RITCHIE: I remember in 1986 the Republicans actually wound up with a surplus but lost the Senate. The question was, "Why did you raise the money if you weren't going to spend it?"

JOHNSTON: In all candor, they were in the majority and people knew they were in danger of losing and they couldn't spend money fast enough. Money was pouring into their coffers in 1986. We had to struggle in the minority to raise money. Phil Gramm struggled, Don Nickles struggled, Rudy Boschwitz struggled. It was hard to raise money when you're in the minority. That's why I know that Senator [Alfonse] D'Amato was very successful in raising money [in 1996]. Being in the majority makes a big difference in how well a campaign committee can run. When you're going to fundraisers featuring chairmen of committees, it's a little different than going featuring ranking minority members.

RITCHIE: You mentioned Senator Gramm's national ambitions. Barry Goldwater also started out as the Republican Campaign Committee Chairman. The job puts you in all those different states, and gives you visibility, and also gets you a lot of IOUs if your candidates win those races, helping you to build a national campaign structure. The other path that it's gone to is to the internal leadership in the Senate. A lot of majority leaders and minority leaders at one time served their turn as head of a Campaign Committee. George Mitchell built his reputation doing that in 1986 on the Democratic side. Did Senator Nickles at that stage have leadership ambitions? Did you see him heading in that direction?

JOHNSTON: Yes, he did. Don Nickles definitely wanted to go up the leadership ranks and obviously time has proven it to be the case. When Bill Armstrong announced he was going to retire, he had been Policy Chairman and my first exposure to it was when I heard that Nickles was running for Policy Committee. Well, what's the Policy Committee? I understand that Phil Gramm was critical of Don Nickles for using his Campaign Committee to support a lot

of incumbent colleagues who didn't really have serious races, that he was building good will for a Policy Committee Chairman race. I don't think that was really the case. If somebody was up for re-election, Don Nickles supported him. That's what the Campaign Committee does. Well, Phil Gramm was running for president, too. So you can find something to criticize either way. I'm not sure how much really had a bearing on the other, but that's one way how a senator can take advantage of a leadership position to advance a future candidacy.

RITCHIE: You could probably also sink your future candidacy if your candidates don't win or if you're perceived to have been a weak leader in the Campaign Committee.

JOHNSTON: You have to perform. That's correct.

RITCHIE: When did you make the move then from the Campaign Committee to the Policy Committee?

JOHNSTON: People I'd worked for indicated that Nickles, who supported Gramm for the leadership position, I believe, had extracted a promise that he would keep certain people on board. Nickles, who was up himself in 1992, wanted me involved in his re-election campaign. He thought he would have a serious race. He actually did, although he won handsomely. So it was a bit of a surprise when we got notified in January that we were not being kept on board. I was unemployed. That was the height of the recession in 1991, as well, so I had to find something to do. And because I had, in my John Paul Hammerschmidt days, developed connections with George Bush, I was able to turn to the administration and was able to find something fairly quickly.

I was very lucky and went to the Department of Transportation as the deputy assistant secretary for public affairs in the Bush administration, which was a great experience. It was my one foray in the executive branch. I'm not sure I'll go back, but it was a great experience, where I was the chief operating officer for a public affairs office under Secretary of Transportation Sam Skinner. That was a tumultuous time because Skinner himself had ambitions. He wanted to be a big player in the Bush cabinet, and was. Eventually, while I was there, he moved on

to be Chief of Staff at the White House. I helped Andy Card his successor with that and even though I was "hatched" under the Hatch Act, played an indirect role to kind of provide political advice to people I worked with. I was the most politically experienced person in the Skinner and Card administrations there at Transportation but I couldn't do politics. So I often times would advise people about who were the political points of contact with the Bush campaign and how we could maximize issues.

I was there for a year and during that whole time Don Nickles would call saying, "I want to get you back to the Hill some day." I said, "Great, call me when you've got something." And one day he did call. He called and said, "My staff director at the Policy Committee is leaving, I want you to come over and do this." I'd just gotten a big raise and was taking a pay cut to come back to the Hill. Because Nickles was so persistent, because I felt I owed it to him and because he'd been good to me, I liked him personally, this seemed to be a good opportunity. But I didn't know much about the Policy Committee. I said, "I'm on my way." How glad I was because Bush at the time was ahead in the polls but wound up losing his re-election campaign. And with Nickles, of course, I got involved in his re-election campaign. I took a break during October of that year and helped him get re-elected and had a place to go after the election. [laughs]

RITCHIE: That's great. One question about the Department of Transportation: did Capitol Hill look different from the inside of an executive agency?

JOHNSTON: Yes, the major thing that made it different was, especially in public affairs, I really was divorced from Capitol Hill. It was like moving from Oklahoma to Virginia. It was like changing locations. Yes, you're part of the same country, but you're just in a whole different community. I had very little contact with Capitol Hill during that year. Most of my contacts in the past were somewhat political. Well, I was "hatched," I couldn't be involved in politics. Skinner was an aggressive enough Secretary of Transportation. I was plenty occupied and really missed the politics, but was busy enough that I didn't worry too much about it. Looking back now that year is a blur. I can't tell you what I really did or accomplished or what really happened.

One thing that did happen was where I did have some contact with the Hill was we had the reauthorization of all the nation's highway programs up that year, a bill that's become known as ISTEA, or the Inter-modal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act. I was detailed as the official public affairs person on behalf of that effort. Of course, you don't lobby in the executive branch. You have to make that very clear distinction. But my job was to make sure that the administration's position on that bill was well publicized. So I did a lot of op-ed pieces. I was still being political but in a very different sense. I was taking a very strong advocacy role on behalf of the administration's position on transportation. As we were getting into a political year, I helped stage events around the country for George Bush to go into to bless certain transportation projects that were creating jobs in Los Angeles, and Texas, and a few other key states. So, there was a political element, of course, to all of this, but it wasn't directly involved in a campaign sense. Those are the things I remember most about that time frame. Other than that, I took a true sabbatical from Capitol Hill during that year.

RITCHIE: When you said you did op-ed pieces, did you write them yourself or did you write them for the Secretary?

JOHNSTON: I wrote them for the Secretary. I drafted them. I also ran the speech writing department. I wrote a lot of speeches for both Secretaries, as well, and travelled with them whenever they gave them. In fact, I remember in 1992 or late '91 going to a Governor's Association meeting in Seattle, Washington, where I accompanied Skinner, as often I did, whenever he travelled someplace and gave a speech. I wrote the speech and I would provide support. I remember being in an elevator with then Governor Bill Clinton. It was my first contact with him since my first days with Hammerschmidt.

RITCHIE: Skinner went over to the White House right in the middle of the campaign to be staff director. A lot of people thought he was going to bring magic and order because that was such a disorganized year. But he got some of the blame for Bush's defeat. What kind of person was he? How would you rate his abilities?

JOHNSTON: I would say he was a boy scout. He was a good guy. He was a hard charging, very outgoing, very ambitious individual. I never thought that organizational skills were his forte. He was more of a cheerleader, more of a campaign kind of guy, very political. He always looked at things and did things--from my perspective--that would give the Department and the administration a lot of visibility, and a lot of credit. Very approachable, a lot of fun. He made a practice of dropping in on employees that hadn't seen a Secretary for years. I learned a valuable lesson from that. I used that experience when I became Secretary of the Senate. I was always impressed by people who were in positions like that who would reach down into the bowels of the building to meet people and talk to people who most folks never have contact with. He was a pilot, so whenever he flew someplace, I'd be sitting behind the pilot's seat. I'd be sitting behind him. He really taught me the value of inspiring the troops and bringing a lot of energy and devotion to a position.

RITCHIE: Well, he got much better press when he was Secretary of Transportation than when he was chief of staff of the White House.

JOHNSTON: Yes, he did. When you're dealing with things like road building and airplanes and things, it's much easier to get good press than it is when you're chief of staff of the White House. It's a very different role and I'm not sure Skinner ever adjusted to that, because he was used to being a deliverer of good news, being the good guy as Secretary of Transportation. When you're chief of staff, you're the chief spear catcher for the President, and I'm not sure Skinner ever really adjusted to that role. That is a role that was foreign to his nature. He's a very positive, optimistic, forward-looking guy, who could do battle with anybody, but always was a cheerful optimist. Well, sometimes you've got to be the bad guy being chief of staff. I don't think it ever worked out that way.

RITCHIE: They want the President to be the cheerful optimist and somebody else to deliver the bad news.

JOHNSTON: Yes. He liked to make people happy and that's not the job of chief of staff.

RITCHIE: Well, you came back in 1992 to work with Senator Nickles for the Policy Committee. We've talked about this before, but in general what did you envision in that job?

Here you were coming back to Capitol Hill after being gone for a year. You're on the Senate side as opposed to the House side, working for a committee that you really had not much connection to.

JOHNSTON: Didn't know much about it.

RITCHIE: How did you envision the job?

JOHNSTON: I didn't know how to envision the job because Don Nickles had not given me a lot direction. And I detected from my predecessor, Rick Lawson, that he never felt that he really developed in the job as he thought he might. I mean it was still a growing, learning process for him, but also between him and what he thought Nickles wanted. I don't think Nickles at that time really knew what the Policy Committee should be doing, where it was truly headed. I think I sensed that when I walked into it. It was a committee that didn't quite know where it was suppose to go, and Nickles was looking for some leadership from me, giving it some direction and giving him some advice as to where it should go.

The thing about Don Nickles is that he delegates extremely well. He provides some leadership but also looks for leadership from his own staff, and follows advice that he thinks is good. I really enjoyed that relationship with him. Nickles made it clear: "Look", he said, "we work with Bob Dole. We don't ever get cross purposes with Bob Dole. And I want to be an aggressive force for political leadership in the GOP leadership. Go forth and do." So it was up to me to walk in there and figure out what the place was, what resources it had, and then to give it some leadership and direction. What I saw was a very bright group of people. It was the largest committee inside the leadership. There were about eighteen to nineteen staffers, over a million dollar budget. They were a lot of very bright policy people with very little political orientation that I thought had enormous potential to be a force.

Early on it was a case of changing the orientation. They liked to do the meaty, in-depth, detailed policy papers that nobody read. It wasn't seen as being a particularly useful part of the leadership. My role was to change focus to an operation that was more of a guerrilla strike force, where we looked for opportunities for Republicans to make a mark and to advance their agenda. It wasn't so much to help them develop the agenda, except that we provided basic research. But I wanted to make the Policy Committee staff more usable by the leadership to achieve political objectives both on the floor, in the public, and in the press. That's when I began to see the communication dimension that had never been utilized by the committee. I wanted to change the way we did things, from long, detailed, always interesting, and brilliantly written tomes, to shorter, what I call "hit" pieces where we would seize an issue real quick, do a quick hit, and get it out. And so we wound up producing a lot more papers, probably the same amount of paper but more shorter things that were just more user friendly, in trying to help our Senate position itself for the '92 elections.

Meanwhile, I was also working behind the scenes to help Don Nickles with his re-election campaign. I finally took a leave of absence and went out to Oklahoma and spent October helping Don Nickles' re-election campaign that year. Just trying to provide information. I saw the role that policy played in campaigns. We tried to provide information to senators primarily but information that was also picked up by the Senate Committee to give to candidates to use in their campaigns, because if they had messages and an agenda to talk about, it would help their campaigns. '92 was not a great year for the Republicans. There was, I think, actually no net change after Paul Coverdell's runoff election that year. But it established the Policy Committee as an institution that was politically cutting edge. It provided information that really helped candidates with things.

One thing that my staff volunteered to do was to help draft, on their own time, an issues manual for candidates. One of the things that we did during my early tenure was that, working with the Senatorial Campaign Committee, we did an issues seminar for all the candidates that came to D.C. They set it, they ran it, but my staff came over on a federal holiday and volunteered their own time to kind of walk with candidates through issues. That really established the Policy

Committee as a place to go for some good politically astute, politically sensitive, politically cutting edge issues. It helped to educate the political community that, hey, issues are important to campaigns and can be helpful. It put the Policy Committee on the map, I think. I'm not trying to brag, but I always felt that that's what the Policy Committee really should do and it was simply doing something I thought was long overdue.

RITCHIE: It obviously raised its visibility with whoever got elected that year, if they had made use of its services.

JOHNSTON: It did. That's right. So, I took my political background with my journalism background and made it useful to the leadership in a way that they had never seen it available before.

RITCHIE: In a sense, you and Senator Nickles were bringing what you learned on the job in the Campaign Committee into the Policy Committee and giving almost a campaign mode to the Policy Committee.

JOHNSTON: That's right. I put the Policy Committee in campaign mode, that's a good way of describing it. I brought a political dimension to what we did at the Policy Committee. Never took away from the policy focus, but just gave it a little more of a more useful dimension because, frankly, the Senate was becoming very politicized at that point. No question about it.

RITCHIE: Did you find that the staff, who had been there doing business under the old way, adjusted well to the new regime?

JOHNSTON: Most did. Most did very well because they were all loyal, partisan Republicans, who had strong feelings on issues and were deeply frustrated that their ideas were not being utilized, and that some senators were not making wise decisions on policy matters. We were not portraying issues properly, were not communicating issues properly. So what I did, in effect, was take that frustration and married it with a different way of operating. And they were thrilled. There were a couple of exceptions. There were some that resisted

it. But even some of those people, looking back on it, who are still there, say, "Hey, you did it right. This is what we should have done."

It was a new way of operating but they loved it. I think they felt they were being utilized more. They saw senators more often than they ever saw before. They saw candidates. When candidates that we'd helped got elected--Paul Coverdell, for example--called and asked for some advice and some information. He hadn't hired a staff yet. We had something happen in the Middle East. He called our staff over and said, "Help me out." So they saw a chance to build relationships with new senators that they never had a chance before. They felt their influence was expanded. To some degree the Policy Committee still plays that role today. I'm not sure to what degree, but we crossed a bridge to new territory that, I think, they still work in.

RITCHIE: The Policy Committee today is made up of the Republican chairmen of the committees or ranking members.

JOHNSTON: Technically, yes. Ironically, the Policy Committee is a committee of the conference and it consists, as you mentioned, of either the ranking members or the chairmen of the committees plus the leadership. The Policy Committee never truly meets. It's really a tool of the chairman and some degree of the staff based on what members want and need. Sometimes what we discover is you have to create that need. You have to show them, hey, you need us for this reason. That's kind of what we did. I felt like a salesman of sorts: Hey, this Policy Committee is a great resource, here's how you can use us. They'd say, "Oh yeah, we do need that." Then they'd utilize us.

RITCHIE: Because since 1947 the government has been paying for staff for the two Policy Committees, they were a place to hire people. And in 1993 that was an important asset for Republicans since they had lost the administration and were in the minority in both houses of Congress.

JOHNSTON: I recall coming back from Oklahoma one day after the election was over. I counted 143 messages from administration employees who had to find work! It was quite a challenge. We built a network of ex-Bush

administration staff. If a Republican senator really needed some policy guidance or help, they didn't call the Policy Committee, they called their friends at EPA, they called their friends at DOT or wherever else in the administration. Suddenly when Bush lost, that resource was gone. They had to turn to us. We were prepared to deal with some of it, but we couldn't do the work of the former staff of the EPA or DOT or wherever else. So we kept track of key people in those agencies and in some cases those that were unemployed we brought them on volunteer staff. We would have to do it in a way that would enhance their education because there are ethical considerations in doing that which we followed. But we created a visiting fellows program at the Policy Committee that utilized some of that expertise. Plus, Senator Dole created the "shadow cabinet" of former administration policy people that we kept contact with, who were sounding boards and gave us some direction on where we went. Very helpful.

RITCHIE: But the real thrust was this whole communications change that was almost unprecedented.

JOHNSTON: What drove that was a real perception in the Senate that George Bush was right on the issues but communicated everything horribly during the campaign. We thought, "Well, in that case we have to do a better job of communicating ourselves." We also realized that without a White House that we were emboldened to kind of lead the way in the Senate. So communicating an agenda became a big priority inside the GOP leadership. We saw a role not just for the Conference, which has that traditional role, but for us as well. The Conference operation in the Republican ranks primarily focused on TV. We saw a real need to make sure that editorial writers and the print media were better educated. Since our materials were more geared for the print media we began to do a lot more outreach to editorial writers. We shared our documents with them. We actually reached out to reporters and tried to build relationships. I took a staff person and made him a communications director to try to get our agenda and our positions and our papers and our information out there and used in a public medium. It proved to be pretty successful.

RITCHIE: That 103rd Congress when you came back, you started out with the Democrats controlling the White House. . .

JOHNSTON: Everything.

RITCHIE: And holding relatively comfortable majorities in both the House and the Senate, and initially getting through a lot of legislation. Basically, they passed legislation that had been passed before but vetoed by Bush or by Reagan. In the first six months, President Clinton actually signed quite a bit of legislation. Democrats had a great sense of running the show until they hit the wall with health care reform. . .

JOHNSTON: Actually I'd say it was before that. The first domino to fall on the Democratic Congress was the stimulus package that Bill Clinton had introduced with strong Hill support among Democrats. I'm going back four years but what I remember is that the new president had, with Henry Cisneros' help, solicited the mayors. "Send me your projects, things that you would like to do that would be good for your community that will help create jobs and improve the economy where you are." Meanwhile the stimulus package, a nineteen billion dollar bill as I remember, was a huge pork bill. It was the Policy Committee in fact that led the opposition. The mayor's wish list was actually published by the mayors' conference in a two volume set, listing projects by state, with a bill coming through Congress saying: we're going to spend money on these projects. We were able to tie statements on the bill to the wish list that came out of the mayors and create an enormous issue: "wasting money." Nineteen million dollars to build alpine ski slides in Puerto Rico and those kinds of things.

Phil Gramm was especially useful but we were the ones who spent all night one night going through that list and bringing all the more horrendous pork projects, tying it to the bill and saying, "You're going to pass this bill to pay for this junk?" That was a real first step and that was our first real victory in that Congress. We defeated that bill and that was the first real GOP success in that 103rd Congress.

That emboldened us. Then health care came down the pike. Again, the Policy Committee played a key role. My deputy staff director was our health care guy, Doug Badger, one of the Senate's top experts in health care issues. We went to battle right away knowing the administration approach was to nationalize

health care to some degree. We knew our members would strongly oppose that approach, although initially it was popular. There were discussions with the president to try to agree to a "universal coverage" and there were a lot of fissures inside the ranks. You had Sheila Burke, Dole's chief of staff, a former nurse, who also had strong views and was taking Dole a little closer to Bill Clinton's positions than perhaps a lot of members liked. Don Nickles decided he wanted to get active and so he worked with the Heritage Foundation and developed his own alternative approach.

We had John Chafee leading his own parade at Dole's request. In the health care case we came closest to actually doing what Don Nickles told me not to do and that was diverge from Bob Dole's leadership. Dole had appointed Chafee to lead a health care task force to develop a Republican position. Senator Chafee frankly had positions that were not in sync with the majority of the conference. Nickles saw an opening there to represent the more conservative members, which was the Policy Committee's orientation anyway. He used the Policy Committee, Doug Badger in particular, working with an outside organization, the Heritage Foundation, to develop a more market-oriented plan.

Meanwhile, Phil Gramm was doing his own plan. We worked with him as well and were just trying to keep the troops together without breaking away from Dole. We really became active not just advocating an alternative but also attacking the administration plan. We took a strong leadership role when the administration's plan came out in bill form known as Mitchell 1, then there was a revised Mitchell 2. We would find errors in the bill and did a rash of papers saying why this was bad policy and what this would mean. It would mean higher health care costs. It would mean you would lose your doctor. It means you would have to go shop through the government for your health plan. We took a leading role to get senators that information during that health care debate that put the president on the defense and led to the ultimate defeat of the health care bill.

So from September of '93 to August of '94 it was all health care. It was presenting alternatives and developing our own bill and then it was also going on the attack with the administration's approach. And we had a lot of fun. It

wasn't just us but we were the lead in the Senate on that issue. Even though we were becoming awfully close to breaking our mandate from Don Nickles, we didn't. I don't think we ever did but it was pretty dicey for a while. We had some tough moments.

RITCHIE: I just read an article that said that Clinton essentially conferred only with the Democratic leadership at that stage and that the Democratic chairmen on the House side and most of the Democratic chairmen on the Senate side said they could pass a bill. They would work it out, no problem. The only one who dissented was Senator Moynihan, who said, "Things don't pass in the Senate 51 to 49 any more. If they're going to pass, they pass 70 to 30."

JOHNSTON: That's right.

RITCHIE: That means you've got to have a bipartisan approach. The administration may have talked bipartisanship but it didn't really think in terms of a bipartisan bill.

JOHNSTON: Early on they did. I recall there being sessions where the president and the vice president in particular invited the Republican leadership up to talk about health care issues. I can't recall when this was, but Clinton early in the process--and this was reported in the media as I remember--thought he had agreement that any bill we pass should have universal coverage. That's when Dole sort of stopped and Nickles said, "Well, what do you mean by universal coverage?" That's when it began to turn into more of a partisan deal and I think that Republicans realized that what Clinton meant by that was something they could not accept philosophically, and that's when the paths diverged.

From that point on, especially with the what is now called the Hillary Task Force, that was the final nail in the coffin in terms of any bipartisanship, because they did not involve a single Republican on that 400-plus member task force to draft a plan, even though they had somebody who wanted to work with them in Sheila Burke. She offered and was expecting to be invited to be a part of that task force and when even she got excluded from the process, and she was probably the friendliest person to them in this process, that's when the partisan

lines were drawn. So, in a sense, the administration did blow it. If they'd simply involved a few key Republicans, John Chafee or even Sheila Burke at a key point, they may have gotten a lot farther and faster, and may have wound up salvaging some kind of a health care plan.

RITCHIE: And by the time they did try to reach out it was too late.

JOHNSTON: It was too late.

RITCHIE: Even the Democrats had fragmented and put forward a half dozen alternative plans.

JOHNSTON: They saw it as a loser. They saw that they were trying to nationalize health care. They were trying to restrict choice. They were trying to take away doctors with a plan that would require changing doctors and that the message of choice was overcoming the Democrat message of "security." Security had too high of a price tag. That's when the Republicans began to win the message. Democrats backed off and that's when the whole thing died in August of '94.

RITCHIE: Now part of it, I guess, was also convincing Republicans that they could stand up against a health care measure and then still run and win in '94. Because the conventional wisdom up to that point was that the public wanted health care reform, therefore if you weren't in favor of it, this would work against you.

JOHNSTON: That's correct.

RITCHIE: But, in fact, it played just the opposite in the campaign.

JOHNSTON: It backfired badly. I recall that we were very successful in converting good policy research into good political one-liners: "One size fits all health care." "Anti-choice health care plans." Those were some of the contributions the Policy Committee made in those days. We didn't just provide the information, we actually provided the rhetoric to go behind the research or

to go with the research. They gave senators something to really talk about that was useful. That's when the Policy Committee really came out from its long slumber, in my view, and played a key role. And again, the credit is not mine, it belongs to Don Nickles first and number two to Doug Badger who's now his staff director in the Whip's office. Doug was absolutely courageous in the way that he brought forth those matters to Don Nickles and other senators. We were quite a force on health care issues.

RITCHIE: What's the relationship between the Policy Committee and the Republican leadership on the floor, the cloakrooms and the Republican secretary? Is there any connection at all between them?

JOHNSTON: Yes, it's kind of a loose confederation of sorts and it depends on what's going on at the time. The Policy Committee has always had a small floor presence. Under Senator [William] Armstrong and then staff director, Bob Potts, the Policy Committee was able to obtain through the Senate cable television system its own channel. The purpose of that channel was to let us have information on a TV screen with the audio of the Senate floor as a backdrop. It was a way to try to enhance the TV coverage of the Senate which began in '84, I think.

RITCHIE: 1986.

JOHNSTON: 1986, excuse me, and that provided a little bit more of a floor connection because information had to come from the cloakroom. We became a communication conduit that we built on during my years at the Policy Committee. We decided: well, we got a cable TV channel; we've got the equipment; why don't we now work with the conference? It was their idea to create a Monday morning staff meeting on the TV and so we actually created a real program. It was kind of laughed at for a while. I was called Regis Philbin a few times when we first went on the air but we had a couple of anchors, myself being one, and we did about a thirty to forty-five minute Monday morning show. It was broadcast and anybody in the Senate could pick it up, Democrat or Republican.

It was designed to give our troops information on what the schedule was going to be, but we actually got senators to come on and gave them a chance to talk if they were looking for cosponsorships or to get support for an amendment. It gave them a chance to come on and talk about the issue. It also proved helpful to press secretaries, who found that the rhetoric used and some information that was used by senators and staff was really useful. It also gave people a chance to see names with faces. We featured a lot of the leadership staff in those sessions. Dave Hoppe who was with Trent Lott--still is--Sheila Burke and other members of the leadership staff were able to come on and outline issues and we tried to make it like a real news program that had a clearly Republican Senate staff tilt. We got tremendous feedback on that. This was one more way of keeping people informed, and communicated to, and plugged into what was going on. The Democrats sort of ignored us for a while. They didn't see much use in it. Now they're going to do their own program. They saw it really helped us.

RITCHIE: Senator Nickles didn't mind you taking the front and center on this?

JOHNSTON: He *encouraged* it. He thought it was a terrific idea. He liked it a whole bunch and was happy to see that. Of course, we had him on quite a bit, too. We had Trent Lott on a few times. We had Thad Cochran on quite a bit. I mean, we had some senators who really knew how to use it. Thad Cochran was probably on more than any other senator. Nickles was on a few times, but he saw it as a way to feature his colleagues and to help his colleagues with their policy efforts. So he thought it was terrific and as long as I played the anchor role and didn't try to go out there advocating policy on TV. He gives people that he has confidence in a long leash, which I have really appreciated openly.

RITCHIE: What about Senator Dole in all this? How did he fit into it? Did he turn to use the Policy Committee as leader?

JOHNSTON: Yes, in fact, it came in handy when the Democrats were throwing the "gridlock" argument at the Republicans. We did a lot of research that Dole then used in his own rhetoric to respond to a lot of the attacks. He didn't personally call over but his staff gained a lot more confidence in the Policy

Committee. I detected a strain between the Policy Committee and the leader's office when I first came on board. I'd heard stories that there had been some friction because some things they'd put out that were contrary to where Dole was going. I even heard a story from one former staffer who claims Dole put his hand around his neck in anger over something he had done or put out during the John Tower days. So I was very aware of Nickles' admonition, "Do not cross Bob Dole. We're on his team."

I made a point of really trying to earn their confidence. We began to look for ways to give him information he found useful in his own media or political venues to respond to attacks from George Mitchell that we were engaging in gridlock, to talk about some of those kinds of issues. We were able to build that bridge and we found a way to be useful to them. That proved to be our way of getting Bob Dole to utilize us.

RITCHIE: Did the Policy Committee have anybody working out of the cloakroom? Were there any connections there?

JOHNSTON: No, but we began to have people on the floor more frequently. Senator Nickles in particular became much more active on the floor, giving speeches. He was terrific about using Policy Committee materials on the floor. It was true during Whitewater, when Whitewater first began to emerge and the Democrat leadership in the Senate was really trying to thwart our efforts. Nickles got very aggressive and used the information that we had developed to articulate that. So anytime major bills came on the floor, the policy analyst in charge of that area would always be on the floor as a resource for senators, primarily for the newer members. It depended on the issue. I found that they were spending more and more time on the floor because we found our stuff being more and more used on the floor during our tenure.

RITCHIE: The two parties really have very different structures in the Senate. Until recently, the Democratic majority leader or minority leader had always been chairman of the Policy Committee, chairman of the Conference, chairman of everything they have on their side. So the Democratic Policy Committee staff has usually been an extension of the floor leader. Republicans

have always had a separate Conference chairman, separate Policy Committee chairman, a separate floor leader--and then you've got the party secretary as well. It seems to me you've got a whole series of independent operations. The question is: how do they work together? Or do they work together? Do they work separately or is there some coordination?

JOHNSTON: There's some coordination. The staff directors for the leadership, when I was there, met on a weekly basis. When Alan Simpson was the Whip, they met for breakfast on Wednesday mornings, with no agenda but just to keep in contact. In addition, all the staff directors of the leadership committees sat together during Policy lunches on Tuesday afternoons, and we worked pretty closely together. We all knew that we were on the team together even though our bosses were individually elected. Sometimes our policy agendas diverged, but for the most part we kept in good contact, worked together, shared ideas, followed up ideas together. We made a point of trying to work as closely as together as we could. For example, if Dole wanted something on a policy area, wanted to see something done, we'd do the research. The Conference would help communicate it. Each of us had our own areas of responsibility. The only one that seemed to be a misfit was the Conference Secretary. There's no real need for a Conference Secretary anymore. They also have very few resources so they would have to develop their own sense of where they fit in. But they usually found a way to be helpful based on their own personal strengths.

RITCHIE: One of the things that astonished me when I was looking at the history of it, was there was a time for them in the 1960s and the 1970s when the staff director of the Republican Policy Committee was also the staff director of Conference. They all worked in the same room in the Russell Building and essentially did the same things, except that some worked for the Conference chairman and the other worked for the Policy chairman. When the Hart Building opened in 1983, the Conference moved out and established themselves there. The Policy Committee stayed in the Russell Building. I wondered whether this created some competition between the two? They're now entirely separate entities.

JOHNSTON: A little. There's probably a little bit of natural competition, and I probably fostered that a little bit because I wanted us to be the real force of the leadership for the agenda. But I have to say that looking back on it, there was very little competition, probably almost none consciously. We were occasionally a little critical of the Conference for what they did and how they did it. I'm sure they were critical of us on occasion for some things that we did. But looking back on it, we had a great relationship with each other. The Conference, the Policy and the leader's staffs are about the same size, about nineteen to twenty people. The budgets are about the same. We were all very sensitive about stepping on each other. But I would say that ironically what made us work together so well was we wanted the business, we wanted the work.

I got the impression from the Conference and the Leader they were happy to see us do it. They wanted to be a part of it. They wanted to give direction. Will Feltus, the Conference staff director, is an idea person. He was not seen as an implementer. I was not seen as a big idea person, but I was seen as a real implementer. We were a very natural alliance in that sense. We worked very well together. A good example was the TV show. That was his idea. His staff did an equal amount of the actual production work for getting us on the cameras. It was a marvelous marriage. In that sense, there was no competition whatsoever.

RITCHIE: There's one other Republican organization that sort of emerged in the late 1970s and that's the Republican Steering Committee.

JOHNSTON: The Steering Committee, right.

RITCHIE: How did that fit into the equation?

JOHNSTON: I had very little contact personally with the Steering Committee. I discovered them just by watching our staff work that the Steering Committee staff--there are usually one or two people that are shared staffers. Jade West, who then staffed the Steering Committee and now is the Policy staff director, was constantly over and worked very closely with the analyst. Because the Policy Committee was seen as a conservative shop, the Steering Committee was an organization of conservative senators, it was a very easy fit. Nickles was

a member of the Steering Committee, I believe, and attended Steering Committee lunches more often than not. A lot of the Steering Committee senators were our strongest users ("customers" is what I used to refer to them as) with Policy Committee materials so there was a lot of communication, a lot of working well together between the two.

RITCHIE: Is it an official agency?

JOHNSTON: No. It is unofficial. In fact, they don't even share their membership list. I only attended one Steering Committee meeting. They tend not to have staff there but they invited Nickles in his capacity as Policy Committee chairman to talk about an idea. I got to go to that one session. It's a little more closed. It's not really official to our leadership at all.

RITCHIE: The original steering committee was what eventually became the Policy Committee back in the 1940s.

JOHNSTON: That's right.

RITCHIE: So the title has floated around. I was wondering what the purpose became then, but I guess it's more of a discussion group.

JOHNSTON: It's more of a discussion group among the more conservative senators who wanted their own forum outside the leadership. I never really dealt much with them personally. I can't tell you a lot about them.

RITCHIE: Well, the sum total of all of your work from '93 to '94 was that Republicans did very well in the election of 1994. Everybody focuses on winning the House, which they hadn't done in forty years. But they also won the Senate at the same time, on many of the same issues, and that put you into a different capacity altogether. But that also leads us into such an enormous change that this might be the point for us to break the interview and pick it up then when you became Secretary.

JOHNSTON: Yes, because again the Policy Committee role changed somewhat after we became the Majority in December of '94, starting in January.

RITCHIE: That's true, you were six months really. . .

JOHNSTON: Five to six months in the role of Policy staff director in the Majority.

RITCHIE: Let me just ask you quickly about that. When the Policy Committee seems to be most active, is a period in which they are in the minority and the other party controls the White House. There's nobody else calling the shots in terms of what the agenda is. Did you find any changes when you went from the minority to the majority in the Policy Committee?

JOHNSTON: Yes, in a sense the Policy Committee role diminished a little because suddenly ranking members with small staffs were chairmen with big staffs, and a lot of the older members who weren't relying on us all that much turned to us even less. Because we had a good relationship with the committee staff directors, we still had a role to play. We were even more sensitive to the fact that we had to work with the chairmen on our papers because now they were setting the agenda in the committees versus having to respond to an agenda where they could use our help. Now we were having to be very sensitive so we worked very carefully in that area. What had helped us was in the '94 election we had built relationships with a lot of the candidates who had been running that year, so we had plenty to do with all eleven freshmen members that were coming in, all of whom were Republicans. We helped them get their staffs set up.

One thing that we did was a staff orientation session. The Senate is not given to orienting freshmen very well. Most classes are small, so there's no need for orientation programs to usher these people in the Senate. Well, we decided it was important to do that at the staff level so they would know to utilize us right away. I was still being quite motivated by the fact that the Policy Committee was simply not fully utilized and not that well known. It was a real mission for me throughout my tenure as staff director to make sure that

everybody knew who we were and what we could provide for them and to rely on us for help.

A lot of that work in the early majority days was to help Don Nickles. Dole delegated a great deal to Nickles early on in terms of helping draft and develop an agenda. Senator Dole asked senators Cochran and Nickles to chair a process to develop recommendations for Dole during that transition period from the election day of '94 to the time we became the majority in January. We provided a tremendous amount of support to both senators Nickles and Cochran in terms of the agenda in all these meetings. Every senator was encouraged to participate.

One of my favorite stories is that during one of those meetings--I think it may have been the first one--Senator Cochran was chairing the meeting and asked all the freshmen to talk about what issues they would like to see the new majority address as part of the agenda. Every one of them to varying degrees raised the issue of term limits. Well, I think at some point, Senator [Strom] Thurmond raised his hand and said, "I'm for term limits too and when my twelve years are up, I'll walk out with you." The whole place just roared and that's when it got to be really fun. He was deadly serious, too. That was one poignant moment, a story I've actually told the press about.

But it was a little bit of an adjustment and because we were now higher profile, things we were now putting out were not setting the agenda. Our relationship with chairmen was good but changed because again they were setting the agenda. And we worked a little bit with Bob Dole, who was also thinking about running for president. And Nickles also was trying to develop his role. He had now a major advisory role in helping to set that new agenda so we got active right away. One thing that I had helped to do the previous Congress, I actually had worked with the House Republican staffs in developing what became their "Contract with America." We originally explored the idea of doing that as both a House and Senate document or plan. Some senators liked the idea, some did not. Eventually we detected severe opposition to it, but Senator Gramm really wanted, much like the House guys had, an agenda for candidates to run on so we developed a "Seven More in '94." We needed seven seats to win a

majority so we developed an agenda that was similar to, but not a "contract." Nobody had to sign a blood oath or pledge to do it. We conducted a big press event outside the Russell Building, in fact near the Taft Memorial, to highlight our agenda and have all of our candidates in town to express their support for it. The NRSC was the host for the event.

After we became the majority, we realized, hey, we've got to turn this into action. So we began to work a lot with the House majority staff to begin the delicate negotiations of marrying these two agendas. A lot of our senators made a point of saying in Policy meetings that this was not their agenda. They did not feel honor bound to do this. The older members in particular didn't think much of it because, one, they weren't involved directly, didn't like the idea of having a contract, were critical of the House having a contract, and so a lot of our work was designed to help develop some of those agendas working with the chairmen and with the leadership. We spent a lot of time trying to develop a good relationship with the House side during that process too. That's how the first four, five, six months were. We were just kind of emerging into this new role and growing into this new capacity.

RITCHIE: Had you had much contact with the House Policy Committee let's say during the previous congress.

JOHNSTON: Yes, I made a point, having been a former House staffer and being somewhat chagrined to discover that there was actually no relationship between the House and Senate leadership structure at the staff level. Senator Dole on his own met with then leader Bob Michel and began doing more joint leadership meetings. Hey, we were in the minority, truly, during the 103rd Congress, and we needed to stick together and so we tried to build that on a staff level. In fact, we began to invite the House leader's staff person to come to Policy lunch. To this day, a representative of the Speaker comes in to join with the Senate Policy lunch and vice versa. We now attend their conferences as a way of educating each other about each other and to try to coordinate the agendas more closely. So, that's one really nice thing that's emerged and evolved over the last four or five years, a better relationship between the House staff leadership and the Senate staff leadership. Of course, now it's very strong because Trent Lott's

a former House Republican Whip and nearly everybody that serves in this Senate leadership staff structure comes from the House. Four or five years ago that wasn't the case.

RITCHIE: Now there does seem to be a different trend of people moving from one body to the other.

JOHNSTON: Yes, especially now, I mean it's true of both senators but also staff. There are a lot of people now in the Senate that are former House staff. That wasn't the case when I came over. In fact, I noted that I was one of the few people in the Senate staff leadership structure back in 1992 that had House experience. Sheila Burke didn't have it, one or two of their staffers did, but it was minimal. Alan Simpson didn't have it, but now all of them do to some degree even Kyl McSarrow who's now Paul Coverdell's staff director in leadership was a House candidate. But, that House orientation, that sense of urgency, that political awareness and sensitivity has really kind of infected the Senate now more than it did four or five years ago. That's one of the things I've noticed that's changed about the leadership. They brought that House mind set with them to the Senate although it's interesting how it's melded with the Senate style. It's interesting to watch how all that evolves.

RITCHIE: Maybe we can talk more about that, the comparison between the House and the Senate style, in the future.

[End of the second interview]

CONGRESSIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Interview #3

Wednesday, December 18, 1996

JOHNSTON: I worked in the House, as we discussed before, on personal staffs for a total of seven years. The House by its nature is run *very* differently than the Senate. It's much more partisan. People were in career positions, but they were career because Democrats had controlled the House for so many years. Really you saw it being used for partisan purposes for years. Of course, we've seen that culminate now with the indictment and conviction of Chairman [Dan] Rostenkowski on the House side, using the post office to get cash. But, it was done in so many other ways, parking spaces and little things that people really remember.

So, when the Republicans finally won control in this last Congress, there was just a complete distrust of anybody who had been there. They were seen as part of the old regime. The only thing that was left standing was the way office assessments or office allotments were made in the House because that had always been done by lottery, a nonpartisan process.

The Senate side was very different. The Senate has always operated on a kind of bipartisan basis. One of the big secrets even to staff here is how the Senate is actually managed. The Senate is actually managed by a bipartisan joint leadership team that in theory and in practice really administers the Senate. For example, when Senator Dole selected me to be Secretary of the Senate, he cleared it with Senator [Tom] Daschle. And anything significant that I would do that would require the approval of the leadership always included not just Bob Dole but Tom Daschle. Or if it involved the Rules Committee, it was John Warner or Ted Stevens but also Wendell Ford. As a result, we didn't have anywhere near the transition issues that the House did.

Certainly there was an audit conducted before I took office. That was ordered by my predecessor, Sheila Burke, just to make sure that the books were clean and that things were fine. When GAO came and did their audit, it was a

simple, easy process. Things were terrific because you just can't do the things in the Senate that somebody could conceivably do in the House in terms of the partisanship and the patronage and all that. Fortunately one of my predecessors, Frank Valeo, was a magnificent Secretary. I think his single biggest contribution to the Senate was the fact that he established a professional system of hiring that has lived on to this day and has permitted people to be hired and to operate here in a nonpartisan/bipartisan fashion. So unlike when Robin Carle, and Newt Gingrich, and Scott Faulkner, and others took charge on the House side, when Sheila Burke, and Howard Greene, and Bob Dole came over here, there was very little personnel turnover. There was some in the more sensitive positions, which you would expect. But of the 236 positions that existed at the time in the Secretary's office, I don't think Sheila changed more than maybe four or five jobs if that. There were only one or two more that I changed when I came on board later that first year.

RITCHIE: Which is a big change from the history in the nineteenth and early 20th centuries when party changes meant that everybody down to the elevator operators changed. Now there's much more continuity on the Senate side--and those of us who work here certainly appreciate that!

JOHNSTON: That's a tribute to Frank Valeo and Mike Mansfield. I don't recall who the Republican leader would have been at that time--it was Everett Dirksen, I presume. That's a real tribute to them because that showed the ultimate loyalty had to be to the country and to the institution, the Senate, before it could be to any political party or any individual. It was also a tribute to the Senate's nature where each individual senator has enormous power to gum up the works, or as John Ashcroft said, "to throw a monkey wrench into the gears." That's really true and a good consequence of it is that it forces people to have to work together on a bipartisan basis. I think that's what made our transition in so many respects so much easier than what the House experienced.

RITCHIE: Well the Senate had been through several changes in party in the 1980s.

JOHNSTON: That's another factor.

RITCHIE: The House hadn't changed in forty years. There was not a single member on the Republican side who'd ever served in the majority.

JOHNSTON: That's right.

RITCHIE: So, they had to reinvent everything. It also strikes me that the rules of the House allow the majority to operate without consulting the minority. Whereas for the majority to do anything on the Senate side, it has to accommodate the minority or at least keep the minority informed and try to win over some support.

JOHNSTON: I believe it was Lyndon Johnson, who during his tenure as Majority Leader back in the '50s instituted the whole process of unanimous consent. That just underscores the fact that you really don't get a lot done in the Senate unless everybody agrees to proceed. That's even true in the Secretary's operation. It only takes one senator to object to anything that I want to do. It's a pervasive approach that doesn't just go to the floor it goes all the way down the administration of the United States Senate, which I think is a very positive thing.

RITCHIE: Well, going back to early 1995, right after the political winds had changed enormously and the 104th Congress was coming in with brand new Republican majorities in both the Senate and the House, there was a period for the first six months or so that Senator Dole appointed his chief of staff, Sheila Burke, to be Secretary of the Senate. But she clearly wanted to stay in his office.

JOHNSTON: That's correct.

RITCHIE: So it was seen as a transitional period. When did you get a sense that you were a candidate for that position?

JOHNSTON: After the elections of '94--and I was fairly convinced that the Republicans were going to win the majority--my eyes were focused purely on what I was going to do as staff director for the Policy Committee working in a majority environment with the other party operating the White House, and how that was going to change our relationships with the committees. The last thing

in my mind was looking at any other position that would be available. I knew very little about the Secretary of the Senate's operation, knew a little bit more about the Sergeant at Arms because it dealt more with the day-to-day operations, like getting a parking space in the Capitol for a visiting dignitary or policy lunch or etc., etc. All I knew about the Secretary's office was that I got my direct deposit receipts from Joe Stewart every two weeks or twice a month during the time I was at Policy Committee.

When I saw that Sheila had been elected, I was surprised because that was somebody I knew who was Secretary of the Senate. Sheila and I had a good relationship. Of course, I knew Howard Greene, who got to be Sergeant at Arms. So when people I knew got those positions, I paid a little more attention to what was going on. I knew that Senator Dole's real agenda was to bring in somebody with some stature into the Secretary's job. I didn't know what the Secretary really did but I had enormous respect for it and knew it was an important position. I knew he'd been talking to people on the outside about coming in.

What really got me interested is that one of the people that Senator Dole had talked to about the job was a very close friend of mine, Rick Shelby. Rick is a highly-respected Republican political consultant, who had served in the Reagan Administration but mostly was well known in Republican campaign circles for being a tremendous operative. It was obvious to me that Senator Dole was gearing up to run for the presidency. First he had to get the nomination so he was looking for people to bring in who had strong connections with the more conservative elements of the party. Rick is somebody I've known since he was the Oklahoma Republican state chairman back in the late 1970s when I was a news reporter. He's a close personal friend of mine and we had a lot of kinship. We come from the same town, Chickasha, Oklahoma. So he asked for my advice and help. He was really torn whether to do this job. He also had been a lobbyist, did some lobbying work and was fairly successful in the private sector and, like a lot of people who have been successful, this would have involved a pay cut coming to the Senate. He had never worked in the Senate either. So, he asked for my help: "Gee, what's involved? What does it pay? What are the responsibilities?"

It was a way for me to educate myself about the job and to help my friend. I was strongly encouraging Rick to do it because the more I read about the job, the more I saw what a terrific and very powerful position it was in the United States Senate, and an historic one to boot. I said, "Rick this is a great job." I said, "You may take a significant pay cut, but it still pays really well. Number two is that there have been so few people who have been Secretary. Number three, you've got enormous responsibility. This is a real career builder for you." And then fourthly, I said, "Even though you've got a one-year post-employment lobby ban, anybody would be crazy not to hire you even as a lobbyist just to have you there with all the experience and insights that you would have gained from working with these senators in a close personal way."

He finally said no. He had three young children and the financial obligations of such was that he just didn't think he could do it. It really boiled down to the financial side. Then he proceeded to tell me that, "By the way, Kelly, I said no but I also recommended you for the job." I never had any desire for it, but clearly he thought that after he learned from me what was involved that I would be well suited for that position. It got me thinking: maybe I do want to do something like this. Then my deputy at the Policy Committee, Doug Badger, who still is a very close confidant of mine, said, "Kelly, you should do that job. Bob Dole needs you." I'd always been kind of the "conservative bridge" between the more conservative elements of the Senate and Senator Dole's staff at that level and I thought: well, if Dole's looking for somebody to be kind of a bridge to the conservatives, Kelly, you're the best guy because you know the Senate, you know him, they have confidence in you, and you're a good manager. So, why don't you do this?

Sheila invited me in just to see the office of the Secretary in S. 208--I think it's going to be moved now with the new changes in real estate in the Capitol. I walked in and said, "My gosh, what a gorgeous office!" Sheila and I were just kind of talking about agenda items and I said, "By the way, Sheila, I know that Senator Dole's talking to a lot of people about the Secretary's job. If you all get real desperate, I'd be very interested in something like this." She gave me a very positive, "oh, really" kind of response, which I took as a very positive sign. This was probably in February of '95, after she'd been in the job for probably a month.

She also indicated to me that she was enjoying it too and there was a possibility she might stay.

Now, I'm going to go into a little segue here. About this same time, I was paid a visit by Bill Lacey, who was the deputy campaign chairman for Senator Dole's campaign for president. He approached me about the possibility of moving over to be the chief of staff to the Majority Leader. He said that, "It's our hope that Sheila will stay as Secretary of the Senate and we can have you in the job of chief of staff." He said, "Now, if you were asked to do that, would you accept?" I said, "Certainly, if the leader calls me and wants me to do that I'll do whatever he asks me." Now, to back up a second, Sheila had asked me to come over to be the deputy chief of staff for Dole just after the elections, but knowing the time commitment involved, not so much the dollars but just the sheer volume of hours, and having two small boys at home, I said, "Sheila I can't meet the time commitment." Being Policy staff director really wasn't so bad because it was a sixty to eighty hour week but Dole's office is a one hundred hour week. When you work for Bob Dole you work seven days a week and you're there burning the midnight oil. I also knew that being Secretary of the Senate was also a job that gave you a little more control over your hours even though the days got to be long, as well.

So, Bill Lacey was concerned that I might say no again if I was asked to go over there in the chief of staff role. Even though that also is a burning the midnight oil kind of job, well, chief of staff is a different ball of wax. I would do that if asked. So I sort of sat back and waited and nothing really happened. Then all of a sudden I get a call from Sheila Burke, probably around the first of March. After about three weeks I'd kind of forgotten about all that transpired and really never thought I would be selected because I knew that Dole had reached out to a variety of very significant people, including Will Ball, former Secretary of the Navy, and somebody that I knew and had high respect for. I thought: well, if Dole's talking to those people, he's not going to reach down to a staff person in leadership for this position so I had kind of given up on it. Besides I was very happy where I was.

All of a sudden Sheila Burke called me and said, "Dole wants you to be Secretary of the Senate." I said, "Really?" She said, "Well, do you want to do it?" I said, "Well, sure." Then she said, "Well Dole's going to call Nickles right now and tell him." I thought: whoops, I better call Nickles first. But Dole got to Nickles first. I barely put the phone down and Dole had already called him. Nickles said, "Well, are you going to do this?" I said, "Do I have a choice?" He said, "No you have no choice. You have to do this. Congratulations."

Then it became a question of when I would start. There was about a two-month period where Sheila was in the process of preparing a budget for the Secretary's office, so she said, "Let me finish this. You don't want to get in the middle of this right now it's too far down the path. Let me finish that up and then we'll talk about a start time." The announcement wasn't made till May, so there was about a four-week period that we were pretty quiet about this until May 5th when it got publicly announced. I started on June the 8th as Secretary of the Senate. All that time I was starting to prepare myself a little bit more for the position. That, in a nut shell, is how it all came to pass.

RITCHIE: I was interested in your story about Senator Dole's campaign staff hoping that perhaps Sheila Burke would stay as Secretary, because of all the publicity she had gotten at the end of the previous year.

JOHNSTON: Yes, well, [Bob] Woodward's book, *The Choice*, discusses this a little bit. It makes reference to the fact that I was the Dole campaign's first choice to be chief of staff and they were hoping to move Sheila Burke out. Then what they said was that basically Dole offered Sheila the choice of either one or the other. She chose to stay as chief of staff and that opened up the Secretary's job. I became a natural choice for that position instead. It really could have gone either way. It was Sheila's choice but clearly when that happened, as the book says, the campaign made a decision, "Well, we're going to have to work with Sheila." They perceived Sheila as being not in political sync with them and a little bit at odds on political strategy. Also they saw her as a little bit of an albatross because she's perceived by a lot of conservatives as untrustworthy, too liberal, etc., etc.

My appointment was Sheila's effort to tip the hat to the conservatives, because as Policy staff director I had a very good relationship with the conservative community. But clearly the Dole campaign was disappointed I didn't become chief of staff because when you're Secretary you're really in a nonpolitical position. Although you could offer whatever advice and guidance you want with Bob Dole, I really wasn't used in that capacity by the Leader.

RITCHIE: It was surprising that there was so much publicity, in Robert Novak's columns and on the front page of the *New York Times Magazine*, about a Senate staff member. Usually Senate staff members don't get that kind of visibility. I wondered what your opinion of this campaign against her was? Did they really have a legitimate grievance or was it a way of attacking Dole indirectly by attacking somebody who was close to him?

JOHNSTON: It was both. Clearly, Scott Reed, the campaign manager, who is an old friend and had been chief of staff at the RNC and somebody I worked with pretty closely in my capacity as Policy staff director, wanted to have more control and more coordination between the campaign and the leader's office. He saw me as the best person to do that as a good loyal lieutenant who would work with him closely, be willing to take some direction from him in terms of coordinating campaign versus the leadership strategies. Sheila very much had her own agenda there, in that sense, although both were equally loyal to Bob Dole. But also, the fact that a lot of the conservatives, many of whom were supporting Senator Phil Gramm for the presidency, were using Sheila to show that you couldn't "trust" Dole to be the true conservative. Both things were going on there.

RITCHIE: He almost got into a bind after he got the nomination. He was no longer in a position to compromise because that would have been perceived to have been selling out. Ironically, I think Senator Lott, who had stronger conservative credentials, was able to make more compromises in his initial months as leader because conservatives weren't so suspicious of him. I wonder if in some cases it's more perception than it is the actual politics that are going on?

JOHNSTON: That's exactly correct. In Sheila's case, I went to Sheila when she was under intense attack. I said, "Sheila, can I call these dogs off on you?" This is before the Secretary's position opened and I was still at the Policy Committee. She said, "Yeah, I would appreciate some help. This is not helping Bob Dole any." I said, "I agree with you. It's hurting Bob Dole and I want to stop it." I made a point of calling some of these conservatives and saying, "All you're doing is making it difficult for Dole to replace Sheila, if that's what your real objective is. If it's not your real objective then you're just shooting at Bob Dole because you want somebody else to be the nominee." I clearly was supporting Bob Dole because Nickles was supporting Bob Dole, and I was on the Dole team. It became obvious to me after some of those calls that Sheila was merely a pawn to attack Bob Dole in the larger context of White House campaigns. They were going to use Sheila to try to paint Bob Dole as not being trustworthy. So it was pure White House politics involved in that whole attack.

RITCHIE: Well, now you were preparing to take over this new job. How did you figure out what was involved in being Secretary of the Senate? It's not a job that people outside the Senate understand very well nor even a lot of people inside.

JOHNSTON: I didn't understand it. I perceived it was largely administrative. I knew it was the person who'd signed all the checks. I had no idea, and because Sheila was busy running a chief of staff office, I had almost no transition. She and I met once, and it was literally the week before I took office, to talk about the pending issues in the Secretary's office, and to talk through the people who were here and what they did. It was an hour and a half. Aside from that it was whatever I taught myself through reading and talking to others. I ran into Bill Hildenbrand at a reception and talked to him about it, which was very helpful to me. Reading his oral history was one of the first things I did as Secretary, and that was enormously helpful to understanding some of the history of the position and the role that he played and what his background was. It was a case where I had to get into the job before I began to learn it. I just jumped into it with both feet and that's how I taught myself.

RITCHIE: I know that Joe Stewart had worked with Sheila when she took over. Did you have any dealings with Joe?

JOHNSTON: Yes, Joe came to see me and was very helpful. One of the things that I had decided to do was, aside from going to where everybody worked and meeting everybody who worked for me as a way of learning what they did, was also to call and meet with all my predecessors. I'd already met with Bill Hildenbrand briefly and was reading his oral history at the time. Joe availed himself to me and we had some excellent sessions where he gave me his philosophy, the way he operated. He, more than anybody else, helped me appreciate the bipartisan/nonpartisan nature. He said, "Kelly, I was very involved politically for Senator [Robert C.] Byrd, but I never opposed any senator. In fact, my policy was always to support incumbents of either party." He said, "It served me well." I said, "That's going to serve me well, too."

Joe actually helped me with the politics of the position. One of the things I did as Secretary at Joe's suggestion, actually, or maybe it was something he just inadvertently raised, he told me what his role had been at previous Democratic conventions on behalf of Democratic senators. I realized that there was something that wasn't being done for the Republican senator. So for the first time in recent history I ran a Senate Republican cloakroom at the convention in San Diego for GOP senators based on what Joe had done for Democrats all those years. It was very successful and very appreciated by a lot of the senators. They never had that kind of service before. So Joe gave me an appreciation for what a Secretary could do in the political arena, which was very useful for me.

Joe also helped me if I ever had a question about personnel because he had hired a lot of the people that worked for the Secretary. He was able to walk me through some of those issues, and was very useful as a sounding board on some areas of advice on the Capitol Preservation Commission, which was not active during my time as Secretary. He gave me some advice on who to go see. He told me to go see Senator Byrd, which I did and which was very helpful. Then my successor did the same thing, both on Joe's advice and mine. So Joe was very, very helpful more than any of the other Secretaries in terms of my transition.

RITCHIE: Before we get too far, just exactly what is a Republican cloakroom or senatorial cloakroom at the convention?

JOHNSTON: The theory or the thought behind it was to treat senators at a convention the same way that they're treated here. Frankly, I had heard for years from House members and senators how much they *hated* going to conventions because frankly they're treated kind of like everybody else. They are used to a level of service from their staff up here that they don't get at a convention. I don't mean to imply they're "spoiled" but in a sense they are, and I think they would admit that. My role was to give them a place that was just their's, for them and their staffs, where they could work, have a bite to eat, have a beverage, call to get help, to borrow a phone, to get a car and driver, just anything that they needed they could get here they could get there at the convention.

I raised some dollars through the Senatorial Committee, who was my official sponsor. I arranged for cars and drivers for each of the senators, which is more than they get here. We found a dealership in California that offered us the use of cars to shuttle senators around. Unlike the Democrats, the senators are not superdelegates. The Democrats keep all the senators together in one hotel, which makes it much easier for logistics. Ours stay with their state delegations. They're spread out all over town. So we made a decision to provide cars and drivers. I brought some of my staff as volunteers to work the convention. We provided their own special phone numbers, gave each of them a cell phone, gave them just any logistical help they needed to make it an easy convention.

What made this unique was the fact that most conventions attract, I'm told, fifteen to twenty senators. We had forty-six GOP senators at this convention for an obvious reason: their colleague was going to be the nominee. I wanted to make it as easy and as pleasant for them as possible and to also make it as easy for them to help Bob Dole as they could. It was so successful that I've now set a benchmark that's going to have to be followed and built on by my successor. I feel very sorry for him. It was a tremendous amount of work and stress, but in looking back it was well worth it.

RITCHIE: Because the Sergeant at Arms has traditionally had a role in convention security and even the Senate press galleries have controlled press credentials for conventions, the Senate has historically had a special relationship with four-year conventions. Except for the Secretary of the Senate, who has had to find his role.

JOHNSTON: I created a new history. In all candor, there was a little bit of friction between Howard Greene and I, the Sergeant at Arms with respect to the role of the convention. There was constant friction when Howard and I disagreed on something or we had a territorial dispute, because I was very aggressive and wanted to do a lot of things. Howard called me occasionally to complain that I was stepping onto his territory and turf and didn't like that very much at all. The convention was one of those areas where he did not want me involved at all. When Dole stepped down and Lott became leader, Lott made it very clear that he wanted me in charge of the convention for the Republicans. That was reflective, I think, of a relationship problem that may have existed between them but also the confidence that Lott had that I was going to do what he wanted to see done for the convention. I'd already briefed him and other staff about what the plans were.

Frankly, the Dole campaign and convention people wanted me in charge as well. They knew that I would set it up in a way that would also be helpful to them. If they wanted a senator for a media appearance or for a floor speech, they could rely on me to get that person there. Howard's vision of a convention role was more traditional, where you set up a room but you didn't do cars and drivers. It was much more of a scaled-down effort. I wanted a much bigger effort, and so I had a lot more political support in that sense. Dole is *never* one to get involved in disputes between his staff. He just would not. If there was a dispute with Howard and I, basically nothing got done. But, under Lott, he made it very clear: "Y'all get involved. Yes, I'll make that decision. You're in charge." Whatever it took. When Lott made that decision, that made it come together. So I credit Trent Lott by giving me the responsibility for me to do it the way I think he wanted it done. It was successful.

RITCHIE: Mentioning the Sergeant at Arms, when the Secretary of the Senate is elected, the Senate also elects a Sergeant at Arms. Those are really two different administrative spheres. But there's a lot of areas where the question is: where does one start and when does the other take over? There are certain things like Senate pages that they share control over their responsibility. In learning about what the Secretary of the Senate did, how did you also determine what the relationship was to the Sergeant at Arms?

JOHNSTON: Well, I was blessed with senior staff, and department heads who each were very open with me. Each came to me and gave me the history, gave me the problems and opportunities to address things. The lines are pretty clear between the Secretary and the Sergeant at Arms, in most cases. You noted one exception, the pages, where he's in charge of the page program but I was responsible as Secretary for the education of the pages. That was never a big problem during my time. Although, where you see some things that you would like to see changed in how pages are treated that were outside your purview, it was very difficult to persuade the Sergeant at Arms sometimes to make some changes that would in turn also help with your school.

Another area was the orientation of new senators. I decided early on in my administration, after talking to a number of freshmen senators who received basically no orientation, and would have liked to have had a better orientation program when they were first elected, that I wanted to be the leader in that area. In talking to Joe Stewart and Jeri Thomson, who had been Joe's Assistant Secretary of the Senate, the Secretary *had* played a leadership role there in the orientation process--although a lot of the orientation issues, like parking, and office space, and temporary space during a transition, were all handled by the Sergeant at Arms.

That was another area of friction between Howard and me because I was asked a question by Senator [Rick] Santorum at an oversight hearing of the Rules Committee: "Well, what are your suggestions for orientation?" I offered to be responsible to direct and coordinate the orientation, working with the committee. And Howard Greene called me after the testimony saying, "You know that's also my area, too." So it was constantly having to be on the look out with Howard to

find ways to work with him. We did not have that many conflicts, but I don't think we worked as well together as we could have because Howard saw his operation as kind of its own little aircraft carrier.

During the very brief interlude where Greg Casey and I worked together, Greg had a very different approach. He really wanted to work very closely as part of the Lott leadership team. I wished that Howard and I had that kind of relationship because Greg took a more managerial approach and much more integrated approach with the other offices that I think is going to serve the Senate extremely well.

RITCHIE: Howard Greene had been the Republican Secretary for fifteen years before he made the transition to a new position. How did he fit in as Sergeant at Arms?

JOHNSTON: Oh, I think it was a hard fit for him. I'm not going to be critical of Howard, and I want to be clear that what I'm saying are observations that I think he probably would even agree with. Howard was not a manager and for that reason alone I think the transition for him probably was difficult. The Sergeant at Arms position over the years has evolved into almost an incredibly managerial position. When I left the Secretary, there were 214 jobs in the Secretary of the Senate's office. There are over nine hundred, closer to a thousand people working under the Sergeant at Arms. Where I had twenty-three departments, he had even more, plus other people he had some responsibility for, including the Capitol Police and others. So the job screamed for some serious management.

It wasn't just the traditional protocol and security functions--and I think that Howard did that part extremely well. Howard really was a great protector of the floor and did his protocol job extremely well. He helped the new House Sergeant at Arms with his traditional roles in the protocol area, and was very supportive of the Capitol Police. Howard did those traditional functions as well as anybody. But when it came to managing all the other things, the computer center, and telecommunications it was different. Howard hated computers. Well, you can't have that attitude and be Sergeant at Arms anymore because you're

responsible for the computer center for the entire U.S. Senate. Those issues, frankly, had become more important to senators in recent years than the traditional roles.

To put it in a very brief sense, Howard was "old school." Howard was the old Senate, the way it was. I represented the new way of doing things. I was Mr. High Tech, I was Mr. Web Page, Mr. E-mail, and that's where Howard and I had our biggest friction. That's an observation that many people made about the two of us. So it was interesting that Dole had both the old school and the new school guys working as his top two officers, but that's the way Dole was. Dole was from the old Senate trying to convert to the new way and here were the same issues inside his own ranks.

RITCHIE: Well, they say that Secretaries of the Senate had computers before but you were the first one who actually turned one on.

JOHNSTON: Somebody told me I was the first. When I turned on my computer the first day I was in the office, one of my staffers said, "You're the first Secretary to ever turn that computer on." When I turned it on and saw what was on it, I was not surprised [laughs] because it was an old DOS system and I was a little bit surprised about what I saw.

RITCHIE: Well, in that first day when you started moving in and taking over, what kind of a vision did you have for the office of the Secretary of the Senate? What objectives did you set for yourself?

JOHNSTON: I wanted to put my personal stamp on it. I wanted to be a good manager. I had had an experience both at the Policy Committee but also in the Executive Branch, and I wanted to bring a unique style of management to the operation. I wanted to be an activist Secretary. I also wanted to overcome what I thought were some perceptions people may have had of me from my Policy experience. For example, I had been in a very partisan position. I was very partisan the way I operated the Policy Committee, even political. I wanted to send an olive branch to Democrats to let them know that I was partisan when the job required it but that I could also be very bipartisan when the job required

that, too. I went out of my way to try to work with and try to gain the confidence of the Democrat leadership, and thought I had a little success in doing that.

Secondly, I'd always been critical of the Senate's failure to live up to the times and technology. I wanted to usher in new technology while preserving the history and the customs of the Senate. Not an easy task, although I think we were successful.

Thirdly, one of the things that really excited me about the job was that the Secretary had had a traditional role of educating the public about the history and the significance of the U.S. Senate. I thought, there's a role I can step into because most of my background was in the area of politics and communications--salesmanship if you will. I think Jeri Thomson told me, "You know, the Senate doesn't really have a public affairs office. There's nobody here that's promoting the United States Senate." With my communication background, it was a natural role for me. So, one of the first things I did was to invite C-SPAN cameras into my office in S.208 and did a virtual tour of the office talking about its history and the art work on the ceiling, the state seal, the U.S. Senate seal, the history of that room, the fact that it was a John F. Kennedy room, and to kind of walk through it. Then I took calls and questions from people around the country about what they saw for a good twenty minutes or so. That led to me doing a series of C-SPAN snippets on the President's Room, and the Old Senate Chamber. Then we recruited Senator Cochran to talk about his desk in the Senate, the famous one that got jabbed by the Union soldiers back in the Civil War, and then got Senator [Mark] Hatfield to talk about the Appropriations Committee rooms.

I relished that role. That was a lot of fun but really I would say I focused mostly on trying to improve the management of the Senate. I knew when I took the job that I probably was going to be a transitional Secretary, that Dole's time would be minimal, that when he left I would have to leave. That might be as long as four years probably would be less if he had been elected. None of us knew he was going to resign. That was a big surprise to all of us. So I wanted to try to use the time to usher in a whole new era and hope to give my successor something to build on, and I think that's what happened.

RITCHIE: You also started in the job just at the new time when the Congress has passed the Accountability Act.

JOHNSTON: Yes.

RITCHIE: One of the very first actions of the 104th Congress was to make Congress live up to all the laws that it had passed for everybody else, which sounds nice in theory but then there's the problem of putting it into practice. That fell on your desk as the first order of business. What did the Accountability Act require of the Secretary of the Senate?

JOHNSTON: Well, ironically, I had helped promote that bill and worked with Senator Nickles who was the original author. Senator [Charles] Grassley became the official author when the bill finally got signed into law in January of 1995. I had been a big promoter of that bill so it was interesting to a lot of people: now Kelly's going to have to administer it or at least help us live under it.

I decided, and with some advice and with some blessing from the Rules Committee, that the Secretary's office should be the focal point and help bring the Senate up to compliance. Senator [Ted] Stevens at the time was chairman of the Rules Committee and his staff said, "Kelly's the best person to make sure the Senate complies with at least the first eleven laws that came into force." The first deadline was one year from enactment, January 23, 1996, for us to live under eleven new labor laws. Most of the labor laws had very little application in the Senate--the Plant Closing Act, for example.

But without question, the biggest law was the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938. Fortunately, my predecessors, Joe Stewart in particular, had created the Chief Counsel for Employment's Office under the Secretary. That office's role was to represent and provide legal advice to the Senate offices that were beginning to face labor issues prompted by the Supreme Court decision on Otto Passman's case many years ago when he was sued for sexual discrimination. On a 5-4 vote, the Court said, "Yes, you're guilty." That opened up the Capitol and Congress to labor issues for the first time. That office, I think, was one of the

consequences of that. I had a team of labor lawyers already on staff and we all agreed: hey, we have to figure out how to live under this law. This is really a big thing for us. It's going to change the culture of the United States Senate.

I took it upon myself to lead the education and compliance effort. It had already begun because, Jean Manning, the chief counsel for employment, saw what was going to have to be done in the Senate. She *knew* the Fair Labor Standards Act, so basically I took what she was doing and built it. I led an education effort, a training effort through those first six months, to bring everybody up to compliance. So when the D-Day came on January 23 everybody knew what was expected, knew what the law was and was prepared to comply. That was not easy. It's hard to bring everybody together, but we did. We educated office managers, and AAs and even senators. Jean Manning attended both the Democratic and GOP Policy lunches just to tell senators, "Here's what's coming, and here's what you're going to have to do." It was then you heard a lot of the grumbling and comments, "I can't believe what we passed!" [laughs] But a few senators were more than happy to do that.

Probably the most difficult issue there was the fact that Senator Dole--and it was at my request--directed me to play the role of commenting on behalf of the Senate to proposed regulations by this compliance board that was created as the administrator, the official enforcer of the Act. The law did not turn compliance or enforcement over to OSHA or the Labor Department. We created an agency to do it with Congress to keep the separation of powers at bay. There was an official comment period. Instead of putting senators in the role of commenting or not commenting at all, they asked me as the warehouse of expert talent to protect the Senate's interest in the regulatory process.

We took some tough stands. For example, we argued that personal offices each should be treated as a separate employing entity. Therefore, unions could not organize across the Hill. They had to organize each separate office. We had to lead the charge in trying to decide who, based on job descriptions, was exempt or nonexempt from the overtime provisions. That's not easy because every office operates differently. Different titles, responsibilities, and to make sure that those job descriptions and those standards were blessed by that office. In addition, we

bought in the Disbursing Office, the finance office of the Senate. We had to create time and attendance systems for offices to use to track not just the hours worked by nonexempt people but the leave earned by all employees, because the Family and Medical Leave Act also came into play as one of the laws we had to live under.

Those were some of the issues that we had to comply with and it was not easy. There was a lot of grumbling. There was a culture here that you could do whatever you wanted, you were exempt. It was hard to get some people to realize that, hey, you have to live under this or you could be sued in federal district court. A lot of them just wanted to say, "Well, no one is going to sue me." We had to tell them, hey, you *can* be sued. As a result I think we actually did a better job complying with the Fair Labor Standards Act than many in the private sector. I'm real proud of that.

RITCHIE: The Senate doesn't work a nine-to-five day five days a week. Sometimes it works intensely for a few months and then doesn't do anything for a few months. Some of the floor staff come in in the morning with no idea about when they're going to go home at night. Senators don't know when they're going to be leaving as well. Their staffs are tied to whether their senator is there. The cafeteria workers are needed to feed the senators if they are going to be in a late session. This institution has always been so eccentric in its own hours and its own work schedule. How do you get it to fit into a pattern that can make it accountable under those laws?

JOHNSTON: I forget who I was talking to as we discussed what was going to happen to the Senate as an institution with this law. I said, "One of two things was going to happen, either we were going to be paying enormous overtime expenses or we're going to change the culture and work a nine-to-five, nine-to-six day here in the Senate." Frankly, I think the latter is what's happening, especially after Trent Lott got control. There was already a movement afoot in the Senate with so many younger senators with families to go to a more family-friendly Senate. In fact, Senator Dole after he became the Majority Leader, instituted a family task force led by Senator Bob Smith inside the Republican Conference to make some recommendations to the leadership to adopt a more

family-friendly environment in the Senate. Many of those recommendations were acted on, although we still had a lot of late-night sessions.

The Fair Labor Standards Act, and the regulations that existed, provided all kinds of avenues to adjust things. For example, you do have flexibility within a forty-hour work week any way you want. So if a staffer works an eighteen-hour day because they are on the floor some night, they can take Friday off and avoid overtime. In addition, there are options for nonexempt employees. You can either work forty hours then overtime, time-and-a-half, or there were adjustable work schedules, BELO plans in some cases, where you could redefine the work week to be a fifty-hour work week. There are consequences to that and you've got to guarantee some overtime to those people. But basically we had some provisions in the law we were able to take advantage of that helped provide some continuity.

We planned for some overtime and one of the things I have proposed, which has not been acted on yet, was to create an overtime--or what I call a compliance--fund. We would set up a special fund in the U.S. Senate as a way of measuring the actual cost of us complying with this law, whether it's OSHA standards or overtime. We'd have a fund that a senator or a leadership or a committee office could turn to if it had some special overtime requirement or needs that exceeded their budgetary authority. That has not happened yet but it could especially if we do wind up into another Congress like the 104th where we had many long hours.

If the Compliance Act had taken effect immediately, we would have had hundreds of thousands of dollars of expenses in overtime because of those first few months of the 104th Congress were just enormously time-consuming. We broke records in 1995 for the number of hours in session. We had two thousand hours in session in 1995. The previous record was thirteen hundred. Fortunately the new law did not take affect until 1996! Being an election year, it was much less time consuming so the actual exposure to overtime, in our office, it was around seven thousand dollars for the whole year. So we dodged the bullet in 1996, and I think that Trent Lott and Speaker Gingrich are going to dodge it again in 1997 from what I see of their scheduled plans. That gets back to my initial

point that I think you are going to see the Senate go to more of a nine-to-six culture just like the real world does.

RITCHIE: I've heard some of the Senate floor staff say that one thing about operating under Senator Dole was that he essentially lived in Washington, DC, and he would often keep the Senate in Friday afternoon because *he'd* be in Friday afternoon. They are sort of looking forward to Senator Lott going back to Mississippi a little more frequently.

JOHNSTON: [laughs] That's right.

RITCHIE: Maybe in that sense he'll accommodate the Senate through his own schedule. He doesn't seem to think that the number of hours in session is a true measure of having accomplished anything. Whereas Senator Dole, like Senator Byrd before him, seemed to think that the Senate should stay in session even if not a lot of other senators were around doing something.

JOHNSTON: That's right. That's a very correct observation.

RITCHIE: Another thing with the Accountability Act is you had a survey team come in to evaluate all of the jobs in the Secretary's office. What did that entail?

JOHNSTON: Well, again, the Chief Counsel for Employment's Office was involved. Starting with our own offices, we evaluated everybody's job description to determine primarily who would be exempt or nonexempt under the overtime provisions. The Fair Labor Standards Act provides three avenues for someone to be nonexempt. Either they are a professional staffer or somebody whose job requires a certain expertise, a law degree or some science degree of some kind on the job. Secondly, as an administrative person who's in a position of some confidence, who's in the chain of command, who handles information that requires some confidential arrangement. Those people could also be declared nonexempt. Thirdly, of course, is managerial. If you manage or supervise two or more employees, you also could be exempt.

So, we had to evaluate every job in the Secretary's office using Jean Manning's team. And it wasn't just our office. It began with us, but also included every personal office and every committee office on a voluntary basis. I think over ninety offices made use of Jean's office in this way. In some cases, job descriptions were revised if it was real close to meeting that nonexempt definition. Unlike the private sector, one unique thing happened. In the private sector people want to be nonexempt. They want to have to work a forty hour week. They want to be able to earn overtime. It means more money or it means more time at home. Here it is different. Hill aides, especially junior staffers, are used to working long hours to prove themselves. So what we wound up with was a lot of disgruntled people. "What do you mean I'm nonexempt? I want to be exempt!" It was like a status for them. If they were exempt, they were important, they were part of a team. If they were nonexempt, they wouldn't have a chance to show what they could do so it really created a weird dichotomy. But it shows the nature of the Senate in that sense and it's caused some problems frankly.

RITCHIE: It's sort of like the designation of "essential" workers and "nonessential" workers.

JOHNSTON: Exactly, another issue we had to deal with. [laughs]

RITCHIE: Because nobody wants to think of themselves as nonessential.

JOHNSTON: That's right.

RITCHIE: Or nonexempt in this case.

JOHNSTON: That's right.

RITCHIE: You brought up the issue of unions, about seeing each senator's office as a separate entity so that somebody couldn't try to unionize, say, all the typists across the board. There is currently an unionization effort with the Capitol Police and with the cafeteria workers, which are more under the Sergeant

at Arms office. Do you think that unionization is inevitable or do you think it's going to be held off on Capitol Hill?

JOHNSTON: I think it's going to be held off. During the last days of the session, maybe even just after I left the Secretary, we adopted some rules that permitted the unionization of the Secretary's office, Sergeant at Arms office, but we did not adopt some very controversial regulations promulgated by the compliance board involving unionization of personal offices. Mostly because the Board of Compliance itself was badly split. It was the only split decision they had and in all candor one of the board members who wrote the draft regs did so with a blatant conflict of interest. They represent unions, they do work for unions, and here they were writing the regs for unionization of Capitol Hill. It was very inappropriate and I was delighted that the Senate let the House take the lead to say, "Nope, we're going to turn these back. Do it right. You didn't really do what we asked you to do, to study the impact of unionization on senators meeting their constitutional responsibilities."

Frankly, I don't detect and have never detected a large movement or a desire for unions on Capitol Hill. People who come to work on Capitol Hill work primarily for the committees and personal offices. They're here because they believe in something. They have an agenda. They want to accomplish things. They want to work hard, they want to work long hours, and are definitely not here for the money. In a sense, the basic philosophy of unions is to "protect workers from abuses of management." It doesn't really apply here because I don't think the workers *feel* abused. The pay isn't all that bad--it's not great but it's a wonderful place to work. Thousands of people apply for jobs that they never get up here. There's a huge supply of people who want to work up here in spite of the conditions because they want that experience. They want that honor of having been on a Senate staff so I don't think there's the culture here for a union to really thrive on Capitol Hill. There are exceptions, cafeteria workers, police, yes, I would see it in those cases. The Architect of the Capitol's office, maybe, but not really beyond that. I don't see that happening.

RITCHIE: In most of the senators' offices, personal loyalty is driving the office.

JOHNSTON: Oh, big time.

RITCHIE: In other cases it's institutional identity and loyalty. Those who have worked on Capitol Hill for years have operated without civil service all that time. There's a certain degree of uncertainty that people just accept for being part of the institution.

JOHNSTON: You mentioned civil service. There's one thing that is going to be a huge issue in the future. There are a lot of unresolved issues relating to this act that have yet to emerge. One of those is the issue of whether a union could bargain over wages in Congress. In the Executive Branch, a union may not bargain over wages because there is a wage scale already set: the GS schedule. I believe that unions should not have the power to negotiate or bargain over wages here in the United States Senate. They obviously would argue if they organize anywhere else that, yes, they can and that would be one of the first major issues. If by chance the unions won the argument, then the consequence of that would be that the Senate would be required to adopt a pay scale for all jobs across the United States Senate. They would *really* change the culture of this place because then you wouldn't have wages or job requirements being set by senators. They would lose control over the operation of their office. That's the next really major issue involving the Compliance Act.

RITCHIE: And there's great disparity between senators' offices. Some of them hire a lot of staff at lower salaries, while others hire fewer staff at higher salaries to create more stability in their offices.

JOHNSTON: And it's even more pronounced in the House than it is in the Senate. Absolutely.

RITCHIE: Some of the staff have referred to the annual report of the Secretary of the Senate as the "green hate book" because that's when they get to see what their counterparts in other offices are earning for doing similar work.

JOHNSTON: That's correct.

RITCHIE: There's no set salary for a press secretary, for instance, from one office to the other, unless the press secretary goes to the senator and says, "Look, here in senator so-and-so's office, they are getting such and such." And it's a personal crusade at that point.

JOHNSTON: That's right.

RITCHIE: Everybody in the Senate works at the pleasure of the majority. Because there's no civil service, will the accountability law create complications for not just hiring but also firing of people in the future? Will they be able to bring suit under the various laws?

JOHNSTON: Yes.

RITCHIE: Over their employment?

JOHNSTON: Yes, one of the things that the Chief Counsel for Employment did was draft a sample office manual, sample job descriptions, because now the employee has new rights in the Senate under the Compliance Act to sue or to bring suit against an employing office for alleged wrong doing. It really forces the Senate to be a better personnel manager. That's one thing the Senate and the House, both frankly, have not done well. They don't manage people well. The Compliance Act is forcing us to be better managers because now if you are going to discipline somebody or you need to fire somebody for negligence or just not doing their job well, you have to build a record. You have to notify the employee. You're going to have to do things that at least give that employee a chance to correct their deficiencies. You can't just fire at will anymore.

Yes, the political compatibility issue still remains. The Compliance Act and the Compliance Board both recognize that you've got to be politically compatible with your member to work and, for example, if you're a pro-life staffer working for an adamantly pro-choice senator and that senator gets fed up with your efforts to change his views and says, "You're fired," on the spot, they can do that, even under the new law. So that issue still remains. But, yes, the management's

got to be careful about firing people, even the issue of somebody being a severe alcoholic who doesn't come to work. We've already had one suit that's public knowledge where a Capitol policeman sued claiming that his alcoholism was a disability. You have to be mindful of those issues now. It forces us to be more careful. We must insist that offices have office manuals and good job descriptions and exercise good management practices.

RITCHIE: What about the whole issue of harassment, which came up starting with the Clarence Thomas nomination, then with the problems with Senator Packwood? How did the Secretary's office and others try to deal with anticipating the problems of harassment in devising these accounts?

JOHNSTON: Harassment was already illegal under parts of the Civil Rights Act that prohibit sexual harassment and was already a Senate rule. It's now been abolished, but we had a Fair Employment Practices office here in the Senate that helped employees with those issues. It was already in effect and so that part of the Compliance Act had a minimal impact. It has changed the enforcement mechanism. Where an employee now had to go through a prescribed Senate procedure to address harassment, now they can file suit in federal court. They could probably still file suit before but it was more difficult to get there than it is now.

RITCHIE: Well, looking down the pike, do you foresee any problems, things that are unresolved or potential land mines in the accountability issue?

JOHNSTON: Well, I only see improvements because the whole underlying philosophy behind that bill's passage was that the Senate and the Congress for the most part were insulated and isolated from real life. And that if we had to live under the laws that we were imposing on everybody else, we might approach the job differently. Senator John Ashcroft of Missouri has a bill that would give employers more flexibility in working with their employees on dealing with this new overtime issue. For example, an employee might say, "I don't need overtime, I'd rather have more time off." Because right now if an employee works a sixty-hour week and are nonexempt under the Fair Labor Standards Act, you have to pay them twenty hours of overtime. You can only

give them comp-time during that forty-hour week in which the overtime is earned. You can't store up overtime. I'll tell you now that most of my employees would rather have an extra day off that they can bank for six months down the road than an extra forty bucks in their paycheck.

Senator Ashcroft's bill will become law in the 105th Congress, I'm convinced.

RITCHIE: To some degree what this is doing is sensitizing senators and representatives to the problems that staff around the country face.

JOHNSTON: That's the point.

RITCHIE: So they can write that into legislation.

JOHNSTON: That's exactly the point. So I think what you'll see is some deregulation, some more flexibility put in the law that will help everybody. That was the real driving force behind the law. Actually the first thing I ever read about Congress living under the same laws as everybody else was something I saw in a press release from Senator Pat Leahy in 1977 or '78 when I was a reporter in Oklahoma. He was the first senator I recall ever having discussed that issue. He had just been elected himself, I think, in 1976 and was a freshman senator and was kind of astounded at the fact that they didn't live under the same laws. I remember writing an editorial about twenty years ago. I haven't heard much from Senator Leahy in recent years about that but Senator Nickles in 1989 or 1990 got President Bush's blessing on a bill that he had offered on that issue. Then Senator Grassley took up the charge in 1994-'95 when it finally became law.

RITCHIE: You mentioned also OSHA before. I was thinking that one of the problems is that the Senate is operating out of a two-hundred-year-old building that wasn't designed for modern purposes, has little narrow staircases and hidden elevators. . .

JOHNSTON: That was a big fear that it was going to be hugely expensive. But it turned out there's a little exemption in the law for historical structures, so the Capitol is predominantly exempt. When we went through the OSHA inspection, done again by the Compliance Board, we found we were really not that bad and we were surprised at how much in compliance we really were. Yes, we had the exemption for historical structures. You have stairways that would never have made it in a new building. But this is an historical structure or historical building, at least the Capitol is and Russell [Senate Office Building] is to some degree. As long as there are exit doors out of an office for an employee in case of a fire, there are no dangling wires, there's no physical dangers to staff, and in most cases that's the way offices operate. The only changes that really had to be made was you couldn't block doorways anymore, for example, in Russell, which was a common thing in some of their office suites. There were some exposed wires in parts of the basement of the Capitol that had to be hidden away at places. You have to dispose of things like paint differently than we had to before. But beyond that, there were minor, minor changes under OSHA. OSHA provisions have yet to take effect. They take effect in 1997 but we don't anticipate many changes.

RITCHIE: One of the things that will probably speed up any changes is they now have a senator in a wheelchair [Max Cleland].

JOHNSTON: That's right.

RITCHIE: Who will need to get around to places that maybe in the past would have been inaccessible, and they'll find ways to accommodate him.

JOHNSTON: We have what's called the "swing spaces," down in Dirksen [Senate Office building basement]. They are the suite of offices that are made available to senators in transition. We had set aside a door and a ramp for Senator-elect Cleland to come in for that very reason. Yes, I'm sure he's going to make us aware of more of those kinds of obstacles.

RITCHIE: He was once a staff member here back in the 1970s back before Americans with Disabilities Act. He was on his own in those days. Now, the

institution will be geared toward helping him perform his duties. Just getting him on the Senate floor will be something of a trick because of the tiered floor. I'm sure the Secretary of the Senate and the Sergeant at Arms are at work on that right now.

JOHNSTON: That's right.

RITCHIE: Well, the Accountability Act was a big part of your initial taking over as Secretary. What other problems did you find as you took on the job?

JOHNSTON: Well, you alluded to this earlier, we had the "government shutdown" that occurred over the budget impasse in the fall and early winter of 1995-'96. We failed to pass all the appropriation bills on time and elements of the government shut down. One of the appropriation bills that was vetoed by President Clinton was the Legislative Branch Appropriations Bill, which funded the U.S. Senate. The U.S. Senate--this was one of the things people never realized-- was the government agency *most* impacted initially by the government shutdown. In the Executive Branch there is a several week lag between a pay period and a pay check. Well, we're fairly efficient here in the U.S. Senate, there's only a five day lag between the pay period and the time you receive your paycheck so when we were out of funds around the Thanksgiving holidays, we missed a big chunk of a paycheck.

Now when the bill was signed around Thanksgiving of 1995, those funds were restored in the early part of the year. But Senator Dole who, of course, was also candidate Dole at the time, felt that we should live under the Act the way any agency would that we shouldn't exempt ourselves and didn't want to see the Senate as being above the law in this case. So, we had to become experts very quickly on the Antideficiency Act, a 1930s laws that said that people couldn't volunteer their services to the government or that an employer couldn't mandate that an employee volunteer. So once again we had to go through the process of educating the whole Senate, about having a shutdown. In fact, it is unlawful for an employee to volunteer even if they want to come in and volunteer to the government--except for those people who were essential to protect property, and

we added to insure that the constitutional responsibilities were met here in the United States Senate.

We had to decide who's essential and nonessential, which were awful words to use. Basically it was who was needed to protect and continue the operation and to help senators meet their constitutional responsibilities. Some senators declared their whole staffs essential, which frankly is not in compliance with the law. Up to seventy percent of our staff were sent home. There were some cases where we had to tell people you *couldn't* come into work. They wanted to come anyway, wanted to volunteer. We said, "No, it's against the law for you to volunteer." So that was another experience that we had never been through before in the U.S. Senate. It was an historical moment.

We went through a whole process of deciding who met those criteria. Of course, anybody who was in management, a senator was nonexempt. Ironically, senators being constitutional officers kept being paid. Their paychecks weren't affected so they were at work. And Bob Dole kept us in session each one of those days and even many weekends during that time period because, by gosh, we were here to do our job and we were not going to leave or shutdown until we had met our responsibilities to work out a deal and keep the government in operation. So, we were here on Saturday and Sundays. The floor staff, because they were essential to the operating of the Senate, were here. One or two of my staffers were here. Everybody else was sent home.

RITCHIE: I watched the Senate on C-SPAN that week from home. From talking to people afterwards, it did seem like the Secretary's office was more in compliance than the individual senators' offices were.

JOHNSTON: We were told that, yes.

RITCHIE: I knew someone who was a staff member to a Congressman from Kentucky. He had told his staff that day, "Don't come in under the law." He came to work himself and discovered that all his neighboring offices were fully staffed. He got on the phone and called his staff and said, "Get in here right away, everybody else is working today."

JOHNSTON: A lot of that happened and I heard a lot of comments. As we did under the compliance law, we brought people together and said, "Here's what we think you should do under this law." We involved Tom Griffith, the Senate's Legal Counsel, and Jean Manning. We all got together and agreed that the advice we were going to give to offices was that they were susceptible to lawsuits and problems if they did not comply with the Antideficiency Act. There was no specific prohibition for Congress so therefore you should live under the law. It was Senator Dole's wish that we should live under the law.

We saw varying degrees of compliance. I know several senators said, "All my staff is essential for me to do my job. My state office person helps people with their checks, people who have some physical needs rely on government for assistance need help. So, by gosh they're going to be there. My scheduler who makes me aware when we're going to be in session needs to be there. My press secretary who helps educate the public about what's going on needs to be here." But, beyond that, you know, that was a good question. I know in my own personal operation, I normally have three people or four people working, and we kept only one in rotation. And it drove them nuts. The staffers wanted to be here. I had to say, "No you can't be here." It was not easy to do it.

RITCHIE: Given how disruptive it was here and presumably all through the Executive Branch, and the bad press that it got, do you think that the probability is that they'll try to avoid that kind of a showdown situation in the future? Maybe adopt continuing resolutions and other devices rather than forcing the issue with government shutdowns and furloughs?

JOHNSTON: I agree. I don't see us having a broad shutdown in the foreseeable future as long as there is a Democrat in the White House and Republicans in Congress that control the institution. The Republicans paid a very severe political price for what happened, although it was President Clinton who vetoed the appropriation bills. The Congress, in effect, did its job. They produced legislation to keep it running. It was vetoed by the President and he was able to successfully shift the blame in the public's mind to the Congress for its failure to "fund the government." You'll probably see some sporadic agency shutdowns here and there if there is any battle over an appropriation bill. For

example, the D.C. appropriation bill is one that could be. There's less concern about shutting down D.C. than there is any other parts of the government.

Frankly, I think another big factor is that now starting in January we have the line-item veto. Instead of having to veto an entire appropriation bill, the president now can just veto or strike out those items he finds objectionable. That's going to minimize further the chances for a shutdown again.

RITCHIE: It still remains to be seen how that will play out--how vigorous he'll be in applying that line-item veto.

JOHNSTON: That's a good question.

RITCHIE: And how compliant the Congress will be with that veto.

JOHNSTON: I bet it works pretty well. I'm actually very excited about the line-item veto. I had looked forward to being here when it took effect. I'm sorry I won't be able to watch it take effect because I think that it's going to force some discipline in Congress on the appropriations side. It's going to eliminate a lot of questionable spending. On the other hand, it's also going to put some pressure on the president to not use vetoes so politically to close down entire agencies or veto entire bills because of one or two objectionable things. So, I think it's really going to be a real positive for government to have this. We'll see what happens now.

RITCHIE: As Secretary, you were also responsible for a lot of recordkeeping, particularly through the Office of Public Records, which receives all of the lobbying reports. Lobbying has been a big issue in recent years. Were there any changes or any problems that you encountered when you took office?

JOHNSTON: Aside from the Compliance Act, the second--maybe even the first--area where I spent the most time was to administer a brand-new law that was passed in the waning moments of the first session of the 104th Congress, the Lobby Disclosure Act, which basically was a reform bill, very bipartisan bill, authored by Senator Carl Levin here and Congressman Charles Canady of Florida

on the House side, to change the way in which lobbyist registered and disclosed their activities. When that bill was introduced in the 103rd Congress, it was quite controversial. The bill as originally envisioned would have created a new executive branch agency to administer that law, because it did not just involve congressional lobbying, it also involved executive branch lobbying as well. Many of us, when I was at the Policy Committee, raised objections to creating new bureaucracies to administer the law.

So ironically, I just happened to be on the floor one day when this law was up and Senator [Mitch] McConnell on the Republican side who was the chief negotiator for the Republicans and Senator Levin's people got together. It was Alison Carroll of Senator Lott's staff who came over and said, "What do you think of the idea of you being, with the Clerk [of the House], the administrator of the act? I thought, "Oh, sounds great." Again, just spur of the moment, I thought it made sense. It removes the objections I used to have before. I'd be happy to take on the enforcement and administration of this act--not really bothering to notify my staff or even think it through what it was going to mean to our operation. And, by gosh, that's what happened. It was signed into law in December of 1995 and took effect within thirty days.

We had to really hustle with a very small shop of six people to administer this brand-new law. We had to write forms. We had to create the systems. We had to create the disclosure process by which people were going to both register and disclose their activities under the law. And, even more difficult, we had to work with the House as an equal partner. It's one thing if you've got responsibility, you can make a decision. We had to do it collaboratively with the House, which we did. We had a very good relationship with the Clerk of the House because the law was pretty clear what it intended. We had a few bumps, minor ones, on the enforcement side, and how things were done administratively, but they were minor issues, actually.

I noticed there was *enormous* anxiety in the lobbying community about complying with this new Act, mostly because the old law was so vague as to be unenforceable. The Court said so, so if you didn't file, nothing could happen. Some interpreted the old law to read that unless you spent fifty-one percent of

your time with a member lobbying, you didn't have to file. Well, even spouses don't do that. No one ever spends that much time with a member of Congress! So the old law was a joke. This new law had some teeth. Basically, it was a civil penalty, no criminal penalty, but if you knowingly violated the Act, you could be taken to court and fined up to \$50,000. Just the fact of being sued by a U.S. attorney was enough to scare anybody in the lobbying community, because the publicity of being sued by a U.S. attorney was much more damaging to a career than actually having them pay a fine. So, there was enormous angst in the lobbying community about the law.

Since I had taken on this new task, I thought, well, I'm going to take it very seriously. Our first objective was to meet the deadlines in law to have the new forms out ready and done. We did. The first deadline was Valentine's day, which was less than two months from the time the bill was signed into law. We not only had to prepare the forms, make them available, but also to educate the lobbying community how to comply with this Act, and even adopt some guidelines before Valentine's day of 1996. We did all that. Now, there are guidelines on answering a lot of the thorny issues about what do if you have to disclose, who has to file, how to fill the forms out that weren't done until two days before the deadline. I think I counted twenty-two appearances I made at various forums around Washington, DC, one forum attended in New Orleans by my legal counsel to educate the filing community on this new Act. I have to say that it was very successful.

Again, I relished the role of being the communicator. In this case, a chance to be the public affairs office for the Senate. I willingly took on a public speaking role. It took up enormous time but it was a lot of fun and gave, again, the Secretary's office exposure, and gave me a lot of exposure too. That wasn't the reason I did it, but I enjoy public speaking, I enjoyed that communication role and even did an hour again on C-SPAN. I spent an hour on C-SPAN with the head of the American League of Lobbyists and somebody from Public Citizen to argue the law, but also talk about compliance. It was fun and noncontroversial. If anything, we had over-compliance, which I am very proud of. We took it seriously but we also gave people comfort that we're here to be helpful. I did not

want them to see me as the IRS, but as a friendly agency they could work with that would help them comply.

One of my favorite stories was that we had one company who sent us filing of one hundred and fifty eight lobbyists. I thought there's no way anybody has that many lobbyists. We had to go back and educate them that, did they really have people who were making contact and spending all this time in lobbying activity? Well, they're spending all that time, but not making any contact. Okay, then they're not lobbyists. So, if anything, we were able to help people comply or disclose less than they really had to just as part of the education process. It's been a very successful law. Very few problems.

The only areas of confusion have to do with the tax code. There's a section 15 in the law that's still not very clear and needs further clarification. The strange thing for me now is I get to comply with the law because I'm also a lobbyist in my new position. So, that was a great experience. The first time I'd actually ever had to administer an Act of Congress and one of the first times, I think, a Secretary has ever had to do that involving the outside public. I'd have to say that this experience was pretty good. We did it, amazingly, without adding any new staff and spending very little additional money. I did have to ask for some additional money in my appropriation bill for '97 to upgrade the technology in the Public Records Office. And certainly I envisioned creating a mechanism through a Web site where people could file electronically, but also gain access electronically to the information that we store. We're a long way from that yet, probably another year away from that, but that's where I think we're headed. I'm very proud of what happened in our office under that law.

RITCHIE: Also in connection with lobbyists there's the tightening of the ethics restrictions about gifts you can receive, people being taken to lunch. There were caps put on and all sorts of things. Did your office have any role in its compliance?

JOHNSTON: We had to live under it certainly and I learned in talking with the Ethics Committee and others that they did not envision, did not plan on doing any public education of the lobbying community or the gift-giving

community out there if you will. They felt their role was to advise members of Congress and their staff but not the public. So, I asked for and got their blessing to educate the public about the gift-giving side of it, to help them comply with the law. I took the opportunity of speaking on the Lobby Disclosure Act but also offering to speak on the ethics in government changes as well or the ethics rule changes. Eventually some Senate staffers, who were experts, did step forward. Melissa Patack, for example, with Senator Mitch McConnell, who was one of the authors of the bill. Yes, we played a minor role in educating the public just so they knew what gifts were legal, and which ones were not legal, and other changes as they relate to lobbyists. Lobbyists have special things in the law they can't do that everybody can, for example.

RITCHIE: Essentially, it's the Senate Ethics Committee that enforces compliance in the Senate and makes the decisions.

JOHNSTON: That's right.

RITCHIE: Well, having been on both sides as an administrator and a lobbyist, has the situation improved in terms of lobbying? Are there still ethical problems looming or have these new laws helped to regularize things?

JOHNSTON: Well, this is where I divert from public opinion. I think that the ethics laws were fine the way they were and that the problems that were fed to the public that led to the passage of these changes just didn't exist. Nobody's vote is for sale. Nobody is bought. There probably were some abuses. If there was one area where there was some abuse, and I'm not going to use any names obviously, but it was where a member could go to a lobbyist and say, "I want to play golf in Florida. Can you set up a planned visit so I can come down as an excuse to play golf or take a 'paid vacation?'" There were some of those abuses. Some people perceived abuse--that a senator could go to a charity event and ski in Utah or go fish in Alaska and use lobbyists to raise money, and there was this quid pro quo. That's a real insult to senators. I don't know of a single senator whose vote's for sale or even for rent, frankly--in spite of what John Breaux once said--because of some lunch or some charity event or even some ski trip because a lobbyist was involved. That to me is an insult.

The more significant changes are in the area of honoraria, but honoraria was abolished years ago. That did a great deal to reform the Senate. All the gift ban really accomplished was to put some restaurants out of business on Capitol Hill. Frankly, I know in my case, somebody asked me, "Well, what did it do to you?" Well, there's less of a need of a lobbyist to come take me to lunch. It didn't really change my life at all. Yes, I had a lobbyist-paid lunch but they were almost always less than ten dollars, which is threshold by which you had a trigger. Even those cases where it was over ten dollars, I never exceeded a hundred dollars per lobbyist, so it didn't change my life one bit, and I'll bet it didn't change that many other senators' lives either. All it did was create fear and loathing. It really didn't really reform the way we operated.

If anything, I think we've gone too far and we ought to just lighten up. It didn't change the public's perception of Congress one iota when we passed that law. What changes people's perception of Congress is when they do things they care about. So I hope we've passed this era where we punish ourselves for the sake of trying to earn confidence. It *doesn't* work and I think that view is starting to grab hold in the Senate.

RITCHIE: The problem is that whenever the press talks about lobbying it's always in the sense of lobbying corrupting or perverting the system. The word lobbyist carries a pejorative with it that anything relating to it has a bad perception. These days the Public Accountability Act or the Public Records Act certainly indicate that lobbyists operate on all different levels and that a lot of them represent very small organizations, universities, charitable organizations.

JOHNSTON: Public interest groups, absolutely.

RITCHIE: Relatively small potato operation but who try to persuade members of Congress to take their interests into consideration when legislation is passed. I agree with you. I'm not quite sure that any particular reform would do any good. Lobbying as a whole has gotten a very negative connotation.

JOHNSTON: Even I got it. *Roll Call*, the local newspaper, when I took my job to go to the National Food Processors, I was supposed to go to the Federal

Election Commission. My nomination was not confirmed in the last days of the session. *Roll Call* accused me of going to "the dark side." I thought, boy, I know what I'm in for now. I think there's clearly some misperceptions there that I don't know how they're going to be corrected. I've been invited to speak to various groups in my new capacity, talking about the "revolving door," and whether it is good or bad for government. I think it's served government very well. Look the administration and cabinet officers who have gone in and out of public service for years. People like George Schultz and Casper Weinberger. I can name you out a whole list of people, Democrat and Republican, who have done that. It's served the government and industry, I think, very, very well. You just have to be mindful that you don't abuse one or the other because of it.

I think my new industry is going to benefit from my Senate experience. Conversely, I don't think that the Senate's going to suffer one bit by my going to the private sector. I can't imagine how I'm going to abuse my job without me paying a serious price or my industry paying a serious price if I tried to. Because again, I don't know of a single senator who's for sale or for rent or can be influenced in that way. I just don't see it.

Obviously, I'm very sensitive about this because I'm now in that lobbying position, although I do other things besides lobbying. Clearly what's perceived, what bothers people is that people like me, who have been in this institution have "special access" they don't have to a senator. Even there, I don't think that's true. If I want something, I'm going to have to go through channels. Senators, I've discovered, are very, very careful. Even when I have a personal friendship with a senator, if I want to go lobby or give him an idea on something--well I can't do it for a year because of federal law--but even if I wanted to do it, I'd go through the same channels as anybody else to do that and they're very sensitive to when a friend becomes a lobbyist.

For example, Senator Don Nickles is one of my very best friends in this town and I'll never abuse that friendship. If I ever need to lobby him or ask for an official act from him, I'm going to do it in a very comfortable way to protect that friendship. I'm never going to abuse it and that's what people don't seem to understand. They don't put themselves in the shoes of lobbyists who may be

friends with a senator. If they did, I think they'd realize, well, yeah, you're right, why would they do that? The money exchanges and things that maybe people perceive just don't happen any more. They may have happened years ago but they don't happen like that. In fact, that's against the law to do it. They'd be crazy to do that.

RITCHIE: Because of the filings, pretty much what your relationship is or whatever contributions you make, becomes public record.

JOHNSTON: That's right.

RITCHIE: Were there any occasion for lobbyists to come to the Secretary of the Senate's office?

JOHNSTON: Mostly for advice and mostly because of who I knew. I would occasionally get a lobbyist to come in and say, "Well, gee, you know Senator Nickles or Senator [James] Inhofe or Senator so and so really well, how can we get them on board on this issue?" Often times I went to them if I needed to raise some dollars for a special project then I would go to them and ask for help. Lobbyists did want to get to know me because of who I knew and mostly because they saw me as a way to get some intelligence or information about what was happening in the Senate. Frankly, that was more from my Policy Committee days because I had gotten very much involved in the machinery. So, people came to me not because I was Secretary of the Senate but because I was in a position where I really had a sense of what could or could not happen. It wasn't just lobbyists, it was people who were in the areas of "strategic advice" or information who came to me looking for insights about what was going to happen on x, y, or z bill. In addition, because of my political experience, I was called a lot for political advice. What's going to happen in the Nebraska Senate race, for example, because I'd worked in Nebraska in 1990. So it was more of a personal thing than it was a position thing.

RITCHIE: One of the jobs of a lobbyist is to collect information to keep the client informed, so part of it is just finding out ahead of everybody else what's happening.

JOHNSTON: Oh, yes. I can say I cannot remember when I was actually lobbied by a lobbyist to do something. In fact, I think I utilized lobbyists more both as Secretary and as a Policy staff director to mobilize them to help me on an agenda item. It's very much a two-way street because there are organized interests, no question. But that was just as useful to me as it was to them. For example, one of the bills I worked on was regulatory reform as the Policy Committee staff director. We felt it was good government to deregulate and change the way we did regulation of the private sector. We called them in. What would best help you? What makes most sense? I can truthfully say of all the lobbyists I talked to, they could have really put forth some nice agendas that would have made them a lot of money, but none of them ever abused it. They said, "Well, I could ask for this but I'm not going to because it's not what you're trying to accomplish. If you do this, this will be really, really helpful. That will sell." A good lobbyist knows where to draw the line and that's something, again, that people don't appreciate. They don't realize that for a lobbyist to do what people think they do would be suicide.

RITCHIE: A number of former senators have lobbied. Did you have any contact with them as well?

JOHNSTON: No, not in the lobbying sense. Ironically, it was during my San Diego convention cloakroom where former Senator Chic Hecht of Nevada and Senator Howard Baker, our former leader said, "Gee, can I be a part of the cloakroom operation, too?" I said, "Of course." They actually made more use of the cloakroom than current senators did. Other than that, no, I never really dealt with a former senator in a lobbying capacity. Never have.

RITCHIE: I've done an interview with former Senator George Smathers of Florida who said that he became a lobbyist after he was a senator. He said, the big difference was that now the senators came to him asking for campaign contributions.

JOHNSTON: That's right. I find that senators, in some respects, are nicer to me now than before I was here. [laughs] I do have a political action committee under my jurisdiction too.

RITCHIE: So, this will give you an opportunity to see the world from a different perspective.

JOHNSTON: It will. That's what's so exciting about it. Now I'm in a different role than I've been in before. That's kind of fun.

RITCHIE: Well, I have a long list of other subjects to talk about but given the fact that you've been here for almost two hours, this is probably a good time to break.

[End of the third interview]

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 .

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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 their 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]

MANAGING THE SENATE

Interview #5

Monday, February 10, 1997

RITCHIE: When we finished last time you said that you wanted to talk about your vision of the management of the Senate.

JOHNSTON: About the future and how it might change--at least how it might change the way the Senate is managed. We can also cover any other areas that you want to go back over, if there are any other aspects to it.

I would have liked my tenure to be longer because I saw what was beginning to develop. As I mentioned early in the interview, clearly I was a transitional Secretary. You had a total of four people at one point or another who were Secretaries of the Senate during the 104th Congress. That's a record I presume. So my focus was, in knowing that I would not be there a long time, although hoping to have been there longer than I was, was at least to facilitate the transition from the way we used to do things in terms of the management of the Senate to a whole new management style that would protect and preserve the things that were important to the institution while preparing for the future.

What's really making the Senate different is not so much the times and technology, those are having influences, no question, but it's the people who are coming here. You look, for example, at the Republican Conference. You had eleven new senators elected in 1994, you had another eight or nine elected in 1996, you've got twenty senators out of fifty-five who have been here less than four years. That tells you how dramatically it's changed and as you all know, the nature of the people who have been elected to the Senate has changed a lot in the last twenty or thirty years. People used to be products of organizations and it was kind of a reward to be elected to the Senate or to the House. Now with campaign laws being what they are, the diminutions of the political parties, you've seen a very different kind of person emerge to elected office, people who are brighter, better educated, younger. They come here with

a very strong agenda, and an intellectual capacity, and an energy to get some things done. There is a sense of urgency with elected officials you didn't see twenty or thirty years ago. That is creating a lot of pressure on the Senate to make some management changes.

The Senate management structure now is pretty much the way it's been for a long, long time. I can't pinpoint it but certainly going back to Frank Valeo in the 1960s and probably sooner. If you look at the way the Senate's run now, it supposed to be run by committee and it sort of is. You've got a joint leadership committee that consists of the majority leader, the minority leader, their respective whips and the ranking members and chairmen of the Rules and Judiciary committees. That leadership team to my knowledge has not met in well over a dozen years. It may have met during Senator Byrd's tenure, I'm not sure but I don't think it has. That technically is the governing board, the council if you will, of the United States Senate. In reality it's the majority and minority leaders who run the U.S. Senate.

What's happened is that you've got the Secretary of the Senate and the Sergeant at Arms whose roles have really evolved and changed. They still do the basic things they did back in the 1790s. The Secretary still is the chief financial officer, still disburses the pay, he still has floor responsibilities in terms of signing bills and being sort of the parliamentarian, although he has one that does that for him on his staff. But, the Sergeant at Arms' role has evolved into a real monster. It's not because of any one person but as the Senate has grown and staffs have grown and technology has been introduced, all these things have been dumped under the jurisdiction of the Sergeant at Arms. Traditional responsibilities of the officers have been diluted to an enormous extent.

What you lack, as a result, is any true professional management of the Senate. You don't have any one person who is truly responsible for the administration of most of the Senate. The House recognized that problem on their side and they actually named as an additional officer, the Chief Administrative Officer of the House. I don't think they did it quite right. I wouldn't do it here the way they did. During my brief tenure, I went back and

read many of the studies on management of the institution that were done back in the 1970s. Harold Hughes, former senator of Iowa, with Frank Valeo as the executive secretary of this commission did, I thought, a magnificent job studying the management of the Senate and coming up with some excellent recommendations that are as pertinent today as they were in 1976 when they were proposed by the committee.

Basically what they proposed was to have the Secretary of the Senate serve under a reenergized joint leadership team. You have a joint leadership team that actually operates with the Secretary of the Senate serving as the executive secretary of that joint leadership team to be the chief conduit between that governing board and the rest of the United States Senate. You had a Sergeant at Arms return to his or her original role which was the doorkeeper and chief protocol officer and chief security officer for the U.S. Senate. That's a full time job just doing that.

Greg Casey, for example, today does all the same things that his predecessor before him, and the predecessors going back to the early days, did. Whenever the president comes to the Capitol, he's there to greet and be with him. The same with the vice president. He's still responsible for security and protocol and for the operation of the floor in terms of keeping the order of the floor. The problem is that he's got all these new offices under him. He's got nearly a thousand people working for him. There's no way that a sergeant at arms can do his traditional role, and do that well, without some serious reform.

I've come full circle on this issue. I, at one time, opposed the creation of a Senate manager. I've now changed my mind. I think there needs to be one but it needs to be structured differently than the one over in the House does. What I would propose would be to have a Senate manager that is accountable through the Secretary to the joint leadership team that serves as a truly nonpartisan or bipartisan appointment of the Senate who actually administers those things outside the traditional scopes of both the Secretary and the Sergeant at Arms. I think the Secretary's office only requires minor changes. I certainly wouldn't change the direct relationship between the financial operations and the Secretary although I might involve the Senate

manager to some degree with that process. I wouldn't change the floor people. I wouldn't change the history functions. Some of the traditional functions of the Secretary I don't think should be changed, but certainly say, the Interparliamentary Services, there's no reason why that shouldn't fall under the Senate manager, with the Secretary's involvement. The page school, for example, should fall under the Senate manager with involvement of the two cloakrooms. It really shouldn't involve the Secretary of the Senate in terms of education of pages. I know that's a role that's considered historic, but it's only been in the last forty years. I don't think it's a major item.

I think that would free up the Secretary to do a better job administering the Senate from his perspective, and free the Sergeant at Arms to do his traditional role, and then really provide some true professional nonpolitical management for the rest of the institution like the computer center, the telecommunications operation, the recording studio, interparliamentary services, that really fall under the purview now of one of the two officers. That would be a tremendous improvement in the operation.

I know that Senator Lott has appointed Senator [Robert] Bennett to lead a task force-- something that I had actually proposed to Senator Lott before I gave up my position as Secretary--to look at and reform the management of the Senate. He's a marvelous person to do that because he has a great respect for the institution. His father was a U.S. Senator. He is very familiar with the congress in a variety of roles even as an administration "lobbyist" with the Transportation Department. He's also new here so he doesn't bring a lot of inbred biases to the institution. Most importantly, here is somebody who ran a successful business. In fact, rescued a business that was going under out in Utah. He's got a nice demeanor, a calm, thoughtful demeanor that will lend a lot of credibility to the process. Now a lot of people have mistook, I think, that task force to look at changing the rules. Maybe some rule changes may occur, but I can't imagine them changing very many rules. These things evolved over time and they exist because they work and they protect the minority so I don't see a lot of changes there. I think that people don't understand that the real purpose of that task force as Senator Bennett

understands it, and others, is to look at the way we manage the institution. That clearly needs to be looked at again.

RITCHIE: In the House they have the three separate officers now: the Clerk, the Sergeant at Arms and the Chief Administrative Officer. What you're suggesting is that the manager really belongs under the Secretary and the Sergeant at Arms and not as a completely separate entity.

JOHNSTON: Not as an equal officer. Certainly the Sergeant at Arms and the Secretary of the Senate along with the two cloakroom people, Elizabeth Greene and Marty Paone, ought to be equal officers of the Senate. They each have their own unique responsibilities. They should be accountable directly to the leadership. That shouldn't change but I really think there ought to be a Senate manager who reports through the Secretary to the joint leadership team and operates those things in the Senate that really don't have to do with traditional functions that are still important.

RITCHIE: Are you suggesting that on the House side they've created extra competition by appointing a manager who's on an equal and independent level?

JOHNSTON: They made the problem worse because what they've done is they've elevated those functions. It serves as a distraction to the leadership. The manager really ought to be accountable, in my view, to the Secretary not the Sergeant at Arms. By elevating it to officer status, you create another infrastructure that reports to the Speaker and distracts him. It really unfairly takes away and separates some of the traditional functions with the administration of the newer offices and you do get a little bit of competition there and that's a little unfair. You need somebody below the Senate level, the Secretary in particular, who can see all this in perspective and who serves the interest of the joint leadership team and puts those functions in their proper role. The traditional functions of the Secretary and the Sergeant at Arms and, of course, the Secretaries for the Majority and Minority, really are still valuable and very important. Those should always be top and foremost here

in the Senate. It's the other functions that ought to be kept somewhat separate and kept in their perspective.

By having that manager report to one of the other officers, the Secretary's my recommendation, you keep it in perspective and it tends to be more synergistic in the way it operates. I think the House would have been better served if they'd put the House Administrative Officer under the Clerk. I think they've paid somewhat of a price for that because it's turned into kind of a lone ranger operation without any real coordination or accountability to the other functions. The Speaker of the House cannot manage those relationships by himself. They need to have one person that they say, "You're accountable for this operation." The Secretary of the Senate should hold the manager accountable to him for his part of the operation.

RITCHIE: You also run the risk of overlapping responsibilities. Apparently the Clerk of the House had trouble having things printed because printing services were switched to the Administrator's office. The Clerk has responsibility to publish certain reports but no longer having a printer, can't get things printed.

JOHNSTON: See, on the House side it's like having a chief executive officer with two operating officers. It doesn't work well, it really doesn't work well at all. I would love to see the Senate operate much more like a business in terms of the management where you've got a governing board, a board of directors, if you are an executive committee, where you've got the majority leader as the chairman of the committee and you've got the Secretary of the Senate serving as the chief operating officer in a true sense. Then a lot of the details can be flushed out. The Sergeant at Arms should be an equal player with the Secretary but I think, in terms of the functioning of a committee, you need to have somebody serving as kind of the executive secretary. Somebody's got to be in that role and more than one person will dilute the whole purpose.

I can propose that now that I'm not Secretary anymore and probably am not going to come back. I think if you set it up that way, the Senate would function better and be more responsive. Now maybe we should look at the

joint leadership team. I've never quite understood why the Judiciary Committee had a role. I sort of do but, again, it doesn't make a lot of sense. Maybe we should take out that. I think having the two leaders, the two Whips and the Rules Committee leaders, six people is a plenty good size. The Senate tends to operate by unanimous consent anyway so anybody can object to anything they do if they really want to push the issue.

RITCHIE: In the Office of the Secretary of the Senate, the position of Assistant Secretary has taken on a lot of managerial functions over the years. How did that work when you were Secretary?

JOHNSTON: Well, it was a little bit different under me. My Assistant played a valuable role in the early days, Nina Oviedo, because Sheila Burke was Secretary. She really was more Dole's chief of staff than she was Secretary of the Senate, so Nina took on a very strong role there, as a close confidante of Bob Dole's. She worked on his staff as his chief tax counsel but also was just holding the fort down while Sheila was trying to do two things at once and gearing Bob Dole up for another national campaign. When I came on as Secretary, because a lot of my focus was the management of the Senate, Nina's role tended to diminish a little and, frankly, Nina's focus was going to be Bob Dole. I respected the unique relationship that Nina had with Bob Dole, stronger in many senses than my own with Bob Dole. She was going to be involved in the campaign and clearly was involved and I wanted to give her that freedom to do that in a quiet, indirect way. One, because it helped me learn what was going on with Bob Dole's other world, and number two, it gave her something to do that was valuable to her and to Bob Dole. As time went on she got more and more involved in the political matters and finally, in July, she left the staff to go work on his campaign on a full-time basis. So really, for the last two to three months of my tenure she for all practical purposes was gone or she, in fact, was gone from the office.

Over time the role I think would have changed. Under what I proposed as a new structure I'm not sure you would need an Assistant Secretary. In fact, the Senate manager may serve that role. I would propose, in effect, that you shift the Assistant Secretary from being that role into being the Senate

manager or the chief administrative officer of the U.S. Senate. That shift would make a lot of sense. In that way you wouldn't have to create a new position.

RITCHIE: In some respects Assistant Secretaries in the past were becoming managers. They took over computers and other functions that the secretaries either weren't interested in or didn't have any expertise in. The job started out as Chief Clerk and then it moved into Secretary's office to help carry some of the administrative load because the Secretary of the Senate was put in charge of so many different things.

JOHNSTON: Well, I gather under previous secretaries, the Assistant's role was much stronger. I know Jeri Thomson was a very detail oriented person. She paid enormous attention and became very knowledgeable in the specific details of running an operation. Nina's big role for me, the single most important thing she did, was do the detail work in assembling our proposed appropriation or budget. She was the chief drafter of my testimony before the Appropriations Committee. She was the day-to-day person that handled a lot of things right below what I dealt with. She was intimately involved with GAO and printing the *Congressional Record*. She assumed a lot of detail work that I wasn't all that involved in.

Also the rules did something unusual, I don't know how this happened, maybe you would know, but under the rules of the Senate, the financial clerk has a direct relationship to the Secretary. In the absence of the Secretary, the Assistant Secretary assumed all the responsibilities save one, financial. The financial clerk was the chief financial officer of the Senate in the absence of the Secretary. That caused a little bit of strain between Nina and Stu Balderson because Stu was used to that role. I wasn't even involved in it as well and it caused a little bit of strain, although they're professionals and they worked it out. That needs to be rethought, too, in the sense of a Senate manager. That's why I think there's probably some merit because the financial business of the Senate is so valuable and so important that the role of the chief financial clerk ought to be thought out very carefully in any new structure. That's a very important role and Stu's been now here for thirty-five years, I think. He has done a lot to improve and keep the management of the finances here going but

when he does retire--and I hope it's not anytime soon--but when he does it would be a good time to give some thought to about how we do financial management here as well.

RITCHIE: The Disbursing Officer predates the Assistant Secretary so the financial clerk got that status when there was no Assistant Secretary. That's one of the problems: you have historic jobs that were created two hundred years ago but what they actually do has changed over time, as what the Senate does has evolved over time. The management has gotten much more complex even from twenty years ago. What is required of those offices today is much greater. If the officers really do their work, then the senators don't notice that they are there. If they don't do their work, they create a problem and then the Senate suddenly has to stop its legislative business and focus on the management. Were there some senators who were more interested in the way things ran around here or were most of the senators pretty oblivious?

JOHNSTON: Most were pretty oblivious. In fact, I remember after I had left being Secretary and was involved in my last project--new senator orientation--I sat down with Senator Bill Frist to talk about his role in the orientation. He was going to be part of a panel talking about life in the Senate. I've known Bill Frist for years before I became Secretary and even during the Secretary's role and he said now, "Why should I call the Secretary's office?" It was almost, why should I care? There was enormous amount of ignorance by the Republican senators, in particular, about the operation of the Secretary but I think even most Democrats were fairly oblivious.

Senator Rick Santorum was one whose staff told me he wanted to pay careful attention to the operation of the U.S. Senate and, in fact, did. He was one of those who called for an audit after the Republicans won control of the 104th Congress and cared deeply about who did the audit and how it was done. When there was an oversight hearing by the Rules Committee on mine and the Sergeant at Arms' operation, Senator Santorum was the only senator aside from the chairman and the ranking member to show up, and he asked the most questions. He asked about orientation, asked about a variety of things

involving the operation of the Secretary of the Senate and sergeant at arms. He's about the only one I've seen that really is focused on, as a project, the operation outside the leadership.

RITCHIE: What's the role in all this of the Legislative Appropriations Subcommittee?

JOHNSTON: Well, obviously, they control the purse strings. Senator Mack has authority to really sign off on transfers. We present our budget and above a certain amount of money, I think ten percent of our budget, ten percent of a particular line item, we can transfer some but if you want to transfer more than say ten percent or a certain dollar amount of your budget, you'd have to get the approval of the Appropriations chairman. Either the Appropriations chairman or the Appropriations Committee subcommittee chairman. So, he played a big role. His role in terms of the day-to-day operation was nonexistent. However, once a year during the appropriations process he paid very careful attention and watched over our appropriation very carefully. I worked very closely, and Nina worked very closely with Senator Mack's staff. Senator Mack was the chairman of the Appropriations subcommittee. We worked closely with his staff to make sure they knew and had involvement in the way we did our budget. We asked for a few additional dollars only to be a cushion against any excessive overtime expenses. Plus there were two or three other minor initiatives. I'd make sure they were okay with him and then, of course, I testified, and put in my request to his committee. Senator Mack was there; Senator [Ben Nighthorse] Campbell was there; Senator Bennett showed up very briefly, and that was about it. I think Senator Bennett now chairs the Appropriations subcommittee for the legislative branch. He will be a terrific person to do that because, again, he's a very thoughtful person and I think will do a good job.

RITCHIE: The subcommittee on the legislative branch appropriations probably handles the smallest amount of money that any of the Appropriations subcommittees are going to deal with. On the other hand, it's perhaps the most intimate since it handles what's going to affect the senators' own

functions. Would you say that their role is mostly oversight or do they try to steer?

JOHNSTON: I think the oversight role belongs to Rules. The Rules Committee staff in particular and I know Chairman [John] Warner and I talked quite often as a matter of fact, probably once or twice a week in some cases, and always at least two or three times a month on some matter involving my operation. Chairman Warner was focused on the Senate Library and where it was going to be located. He was very focused on space allocation involving both my office but also the others and very interested in also a report that we did-- that actually Dick Baker wrote along with Diane Skvarla--on how we should improve the education of visitors to the Capitol. So, clearly, the Rules Chairman was very focused on the oversight of the operation. I'd probably talk to the Rules Committee staff director or his staff several times a week on matters they had some involvement and awareness in.

The Appropriations subcommittee really didn't play an oversight role. I would say it was probably more of a stamp of approval or a check on what my initiatives were, where I wanted to go as it related to the dollars given to us by the Congress for our operation. The only other role they played was every year the Senate has the option or the authority to grant a cost-of-living adjustment to the Senate accounts of personal offices and also the officers of the Senate. It's kind of an odd process. It's done on kind of an ad hoc basis between the President Pro Tem's office, who actually has the authority, but involving to some degree the leader and also the Appropriations Committee chairmen and subcommittee chairmen. They would all get together through their staff and figure out what to do.

During my tenure in early 1996 we chose not to do a COLA. It was the first time in many years because we were trying to reduce expenses. It was felt that would be sending a mixed signal to cut our budgets fifteen percent or 12.5 percent in my case and then turn right around and grant a COLA to restore some of the funds. They chose to just keep it the same. I think a COLA this year has been granted, which is a good idea because that was a

pretty long drought--two years without having some sort of an adjustment in the finances of the Senate.

RITCHIE: You mentioned that the Joint Leadership Committee doesn't meet. But how involved do the majority leader and the minority leader get in the workings within the Secretary's office?

JOHNSTON: I think it depends on their interests. I know Bob Dole did not get involved. He had other fish to fry and he knew the operation. If he needed something, he'd call. He occasionally would drop by the office, usually to see Jon Lynn Kerchner, who was my administrative assistant in the Secretary's office. They had a long relationship. She'd been his office manager in the leadership and she still did some things for him directly. She did the calligraphy, for example, on his photographs that people asked for to have him autograph. She also handled all of his nominations and appointments to various boards and commissions that the Republican leader had the authority to appoint people to.

He, of course, always saw the parliamentarian just to get advice or some direction on things he wanted to do on the floor. If he had need for our office, he went and saw the person he knew was in charge. He had intimate knowledge of the Secretary's operation and didn't really need to involve me unless there was something going on like with the codel. During the government shutdown, for example, I got orders from him via Sheila Burke, Dole doesn't want anybody going out on government trips while the shutdown's going on. So, it was up to me to execute those orders.

Lott was a very different story. Senator Lott was not familiar at all with the operation of the Secretary. In fact, as he would tell you, had different perceptions completely about what the Secretary did from reality. I spent a lot of time with him early on just educating him and informing about what I was responsible for and what I did. They were never long sessions. He was not all that focused on the operation, but he wanted to know enough so he could make a judgment as to who ought to do the job when I left the Secretary's office. He was very interested and it was part of his education process. But, even in his

case, he was more focused on the bigger picture, the strategy, the floor strategy, the political strategy. It was not a high priority for him to know the operation. He wanted to know enough to make a judgment and to know whoever he put there would do the job and wouldn't be a distraction for him.

RITCHIE: It's an unusual circumstance to have the majority leader running for president. . . .

JOHNSTON: Yes it is.

RITCHIE: As actively as Senator Dole was during the 104th Congress. How did that affect things just in general?

JOHNSTON: Well, it added a level of tension to the operation. Everything was seen through a prism of Dole's candidacy for president. Even during the government shutdown when Dole kept us in session on Saturdays, on Sundays and around the clock, it was all seen in a paradigm of, well, Dole's got to do these things because he's running for president. He's got to protect his interest. I'm not sure the place would have run any differently had he not been running for president. It may have been less intense but as soon as he resigned, it was like this big burden was lifted off our shoulders and suddenly we were back to normal again with Trent Lott.

I have to say that a Majority Leader running for president is not a very good thing for an institution. Not because it's bad for the Senate or that leader should not run. I would never say that. It just brings a whole political dimension to the operation that really does add one more hurdle to get things done. It distracts the leader from operating the Senate, although Dole handled it better than I thought he could. Clearly he wasn't focused on my operation or the rest of the operation. It creates an opportunity, if you don't have good people, for things to go sour. It puts extra pressure on people like me, or the sergeant at arms, to do a better job. It also adds a whole layer of tension between the majority and the minority because the minority is going to be loyal to their president as they were so they tended to look for ways to block or impede any effort by Senator Dole that would accrue to his benefit.

When he left, that tension just kind of vaporized. Things got done in the last few months when the dimension of White House politics was gone. A lot of people took notice and I don't think we'll see a majority leader do what Dole did again unless it's to leave early and resign. It just shows that it's very, very hard, as Howard Baker told us when he ran in 1980, to run and be leader and do either job well.

RITCHIE: Dole is the first majority leader to get the presidential nomination. A number of others have wanted it, like Howard Baker and Lyndon Johnson, but usually they were bound to Washington in a way that hurt them when they tried to campaign. It works against the leader in both directions.

JOHNSTON: It works against the leader. If somebody wants to be president, don't be majority leader, that would be my recommendation. Because you run into, as Bob Dole did, inherent conflicts. You run into a variety of traps and step on mines that you otherwise wouldn't have to do. You're much better off being a governor or much better off being out of office and having full time to run. If you look at people who have been elected in recent years, it's been people like Bill Clinton who was able to run midterm as governor, not having to worry about things too much back home, as Ronald Reagan or Jimmy Carter who were in private life and could run. You really don't have to do that any more to be successful. I don't see it changing. If somebody asked me today, who was a governor or a U.S. senator and wanted to run for president what would I do, I would say, well, there are a variety of ways but you ought to just step down and go into private life. Do what Jack Kemp has done basically and just take care of your family for a few years and then go off and give it your all. Lamar Alexander has chosen that same course.

Even Phil Gramm, a sitting U.S. senator, had a lot of trouble, I think, trying to balance the Senate and run. That was another dimension to Bob Dole's difficulties, as leader and candidate. He had three colleagues running against him. You had Dick Lugar and [Arlen] Specter, which really had no impact on Dole. But you had Phil Gramm who had enormous impact on Bob

Dole because he was seen as Dole's most serious competitor. You even saw Senator Dole do things in the committee selection process, the floor strategy and timing of votes, that were designed to embarrass his opponent, Phil Gramm, not the Democrats, and so that affected the operation of the Senate. Phil Gramm missed a lot of votes. Well, Bob Dole set it up that way. He'd know if Phil Gramm wouldn't be around, he'd schedule a vote just to make sure he wasn't there. You saw a lot of those kind of things. That was smart politics but again it had some impact on the operation of the U.S. Senate and I'm not sure that was all that healthy, frankly.

RITCHIE: I remember sitting in the gallery on the day of the Balanced Budget Amendment vote and Senator Gramm came through the door at the last second to vote. If it was going to be a deciding vote, then he would cast the deciding vote. I can remember Senator Dole's expression as he watched Senator Gramm coming in the door. I'm not sure if C-SPAN caught that or not.

JOHNSTON: No, it's pretty hard to catch that on C-SPAN, that's right. But, it really was not a good thing and I don't know what Senator Lott's plans are, whether he aspires to the presidency or not. I'm sure he's going to have to think real hard about it. You'd have to have an awfully big majority, it would require a sixty plus conference to really do that. You need the cushion of knowing that you really do have the forces in the Senate to do it. Dole, with a 53-47 margin, just couldn't do it. It really requires a 60-40 or better Senate to really make it work in my opinion.

RITCHIE: When historians look at Congresses, I think that the 104th Congress is going to get written about a lot, the way the 80th Congress, for instance, has been written about. You were right there in the thick of it, before it and all during it. What's your assessment of the 104th Congress?

JOHNSTON: Well, it reminds me a lot of the 96th Congress, although different in the sense that Republicans truly had control of the House and the Senate. They both were elected in similar environments, an environment of resentment, anger and a backlash against government. What made it different

was that you had a president of the other party in the White House versus all being unified. I think had George Bush been in his third second, there never been a turnover. It would have been a very calm, mild Congress, the 104th. It still would have been Democrat controlled, more than likely. We talked about my tenure being transitional tenure--it was a very transitional Congress. It was kind of a leap of sorts from the 103rd to the 104th, obviously because we changed parties but you really saw not just a change of party control but a complete change in the way the institutions operated, much more so in the House than in the Senate. Watching the pressures of the old way and the new style between parties was incredible.

What made it unique, too, was the sheer hours, the sheer volume of work, the sheer size and dimensions of the agenda that was being pursued. It was a very political Congress because you saw Democrats frankly *deeply* resentful that they were not in charge. That was very evident in the House and not much less evident in the Senate. Everything Democrats did in the House and the Senate from my perspective was geared to getting control back. And I understood why, because a lot of the Republican senators had been both in the majority and in the minority. Don Nickles is one who came here in 1980 when the Senate was controlled by Republicans. They really missed being in the majority. It means a lot to be able to be a committee chairman and to control the agenda, to hire a good size staff, and to do things you want to do versus being in a minority where you really have no power.

I think that you saw Democrats seeing '96 as being their chance to get control back, and history being on their side because Republicans weren't able to keep control after the last time they had charge or the last time they had control. So, knowing full well that they didn't get control even with Bill Clinton reelected, then '98 probably would be a long time before they got control back. I think that's their mindset now. That's why I think we'll see a lot of Democratic retirements in 1998. You've got five Democratic senators who are over the age of seventy. I expect four of those possibly to retire. You've got [Daniel] Inouye who I think will run again. He's very popular in Hawaii. You've got Senator [Wendell] Ford who may or may not run again.

He's over seventy. You've got John Glenn. You've got Fritz Hollings and Dale Bumpers over the age of seventy. All those states save Hawaii, the Republicans could easily win those competitive open-seat races. So, I think you're going to see a transition from an older Senate to a younger Senate.

You also saw with the 104th Congress, the real demise of what I call the middle, the moderate middle of both Democrats and Republicans. I suspected--but it did not happen--that Bill Clinton would really cultivate the moderate senators on the Republican side. There were seven Republican moderate senators in the last Congress that Bill Clinton, I thought, would cultivate and use to build a majority on major issues, or at least take away the Republican majority in the 104th Congress. He didn't do it and I'm not quite sure why. I didn't see them cultivated and I think that those senators could have easily been cultivated and never were. Now that middle is gone. Not as gone as people think, but smaller. The Alan Simpsons and the Bill Cohens are no longer with us and they've been replaced by a little more predictable Republican loyalists than they were before. So I think you've seen a transition to what many thought would be more polarized--actually it's not as polarized because I think there's been a thought process, a climate evolved that, hey, this is getting kind of old and really we are going to be punished now if we don't start working together better.

RITCHIE: A lot of attention was on the House. Of course they hadn't changed in forty years and they had a very outspoken leader. Did you get any sense that senators resented the attention that the House was getting, especially the first year?

JOHNSTON: I think a little. I think there was, especially on Bob Dole's part. He was never close to Newt and never particularly embraced his style or his politics. So Dole had kind of an uneasy situation where he didn't want to be seen as following, and didn't want to be seen as too close, and didn't feel comfortable getting out front. As time went on I think there was a realization by senators, hey, it's good that we're in the background, that we're not out in front of all these things, and that we shouldn't try to emulate what they do because it will be our undoing if we do. So, it really worked out well

for Dole. Whatever resentment may have been there in the beginning was not there at the end.

RITCHIE: How about among the freshmen senators? A lot of them came from the House. They must have sort of felt as if they had switched at the wrong time.

JOHNSTON: There was a lot of frustration. You had people like Jim Inhofe and Jon Kyl who were elected in the '94 election in the same environment that their House brethren were, who clearly were very close to their House brethren. Rick Santorum's another one; Judd Gregg and others. They were very frustrated at times by the inability of the Senate to do what the House did in moving the agenda forward. As time went on, I think they saw the benefit of it and I think they would say they'd be the last ones to change some of the rules that prevented some of those things from happening.

A lot of the frustration was much more frustration on the House with the Senate than there was in the Senate side with its own numbers. I remember going to a meeting of the Whip staff operations where Trent Lott and his staff met with Tom DeLay and his staff and there was a House member, John Doolittle from California, one of the deputy House Whips, who was just screaming at Lott about the Senate being a graveyard, if you will, for their initiatives and why couldn't they do something. Lott was in a very uncomfortable position of sharing their view about wanting to get things done but also being in the Senate and realizing, well, there's a reason why we can't do that. We're not set up that way and we're not going to change our way of doing things. That all diminished as time went on and as people realized the situation. There was a backlash to, not so much the House agenda, but the House's way of operating. I don't think that the press or the people really rejected the Republican message, but they didn't like the messengers. That's what the Senate saw from that process. It served them well, I think, politically in the end.

RITCHIE: You have different loyalties. One is to the party's agenda but the other is to the institution. You have the Senate versus the House, with

the Senate not necessarily wanting to rubber stamp what the House had done, but being able to deliberate, and amend, and perfect.

JOHNSTON: They were a filter.

RITCHIE: For legislation, yes.

JOHNSTON: There were a lot of times that the Republican leadership made a kind of minor initiative, if you will, to say, "Hey, look, we are passing the agenda. We are meeting on the contract items." You didn't hear the senators talk much about the "Contract With America," but you heard them talk a lot about the specific elements of the contract that were popular. I think that's where there was some frustration. I think the Senate did a lot more to follow the House's lead than people realize. The Senate just phrased it differently.

RITCHIE: Do you anticipate that they are going to do things differently in the 105th?

JOHNSTON: The 105th will be a very different Congress, much more like the Congresses of old, more of the return to normalcy if you would. I hate to use the Warren Harding phrase but it really does fit. I've learned and I've perceived over my last eighteen years that there are these slow pendulum swings in the way the House and the Senate operate. It reflects the public opinion. We go from a public that wants more government to the other end where there's a backlash against too much. Sometimes the pendulum will slow down and sometimes it will speed up. There's a rhythm but there's not necessarily a reason or a rhyme.

I think the 105th is going to be what I call a "hangover Congress" because the last Congress was absolutely tumultuous. It was turbulent. It was pivotal. I think you're going to see things calm down as you would after a dramatic scene in a movie. Lott's style is to be very canny, not get out in front of his troops too much. He's going to be a very cautious but bold individual. I know that sounds contradictory but it's his style to move a little

bit more slowly, not to get way out front, and he's got very good political antenna. He knows where the public is. The public's kind of hungover after the last Congress, too, so he's going to move slowly. He's going to cherry pick those things that really accrue the best benefit. He'll be very political but in a very different sense. He'll be able to respond instinctively to the mood in terms of setting the agenda on the floor and how fast he moves his troops.

He's also, along with the Republican senators and I think a large number of Democratic senators, very concerned about burning senators out, about their time with their families. We had, as I mentioned before, a record number of votes, record numbers of days and hours in session in the last Congress. Frankly, people were just flat tired after the last Congress. So I think he's going to move more slowly and more deliberately and push an agenda that is more to implement the changes that occurred last Congress and solidify the gains. If I were to guess as to what Lott's real strategy is, it is to solidify politically the majority and on a policy perspective solidify and improve on gains made in the last Congress. You'll see this as being a relatively unhistoric Congress, no less important than the 104th, but in a very different sense, one that is going to build on the changes. It's like we turned a big corner last Congress and now it's okay just to stay on the street without any more lightning bolts from the sky or any potholes and just keep marching in the same basic direction.

RITCHIE: Senator Lott does seem to be a very organized person who wants to have control over what's going on. He instituted a lot of changes already, before the last Congress was over. He changed many of the personnel, including the Sergeant at Arms and Secretary of the Senate. This was between one Republican majority leader and another. Why do you think that he wanted to make such big changes in the institution as soon as he stepped into the job?

JOHNSTON: I'll tell you a little story. I remember in my early days at the Policy Committee back in 1992 when Senator Lott at that point was just a junior senator. He didn't have a leadership role. He was deeply frustrated. He was a real activist guy. He wanted to do things and get things done right

now, not unlike a lot of junior senators do. I remember seeing him at one point, and I had known him from my days on the House side when I was a staffer and he was the Whip. We were walking into Dole's office once for a leadership meeting or for a conference meeting and just making pleasant conversation I said, "How you doing senator?" He said, "Well, I wish we were doing a whole lot better!" He clearly had a big frustration that we weren't getting enough done and things were moving too slowly for him.

He really has a very different style than Bob Dole in the sense that he really wants to put his stamp on things, he really wants the Senate to reflect a different way of doing things. He's got the same problem and the same challenges that I did in the sense that you're trying to move the Senate into a new era without giving up that which makes it a unique and special and very successful institution. I think his frustration's more on the political side. I think he saw Dole as being too accommodationist. Now a funny thing is that Lott's very accommodating too, but in a very different way. Lott is a little more politically, I won't say attuned, but he's politically tougher than Dole in some respect. Dole loved the institution and was often criticized for not being eager enough to jump on things for political advantage. Lott is more inclined to do that but Lott will do it in a way that he'll never surprise his colleagues. Lott learned a lot from Dole. I think he would even tell you that now.

If you look at the way he staffs up--getting back to your question--Lott likes people around him that he really trusts. The single most important quality anybody can have in this business of working for an elected official is loyalty. It really means more to Lott than it does with most senators. It really is important to him and while some senators would be comfortable with moving into a job and keeping a lot of the current staff because he trusts them and they do a good job, Lott is the kind of person that's going to want to put in his people. He liked me fine. We got along famously, but I was not his guy. I did not work for him. I'd never been part of his universe or his world. I'd been part of Don Nickles' universe and world and he just wasn't going to operate that way. He kept me on for several months after because he did have enough confidence that he didn't want to rock the boat and change the furniture too quickly. But, he really wanted to have his people, people who are

in every waking moment of their professional life thinking: "How can I advance or protect Trent Lott's interest?" You see that in the way he set up his leadership office. There are some people who would say that Lott's leadership staff isn't as bright or as talented as Bob Dole's staff was. That may or may not be true. I don't really know yet. But, you can never question that Lott's staff is loyal.

The one thing about Lott is that the way he operates is that he's front and center always. He never tolerates staff doing things up front. Dole was more tolerant of that. Dole didn't mind Sheila Burke being out front on some things. He didn't mind Kelly Johnston talking to reporters about the operation of the Senate as long as it reflected well on Bob Dole. Trent Lott wouldn't let staff get out that far. My perception is that staff are on a much shorter leash with Trent Lott than they were with Bob Dole. That's the big difference and that's because he really wants to be in charge, more in control perhaps than Bob Dole was.

RITCHIE: At that time of all those changes in personnel, you were nominated to the Federal Election Commission. Senator Dole presumably intervened to suggest that. What happened?

JOHNSTON: Dole, as he typically does, operates through intermediaries for a lot of his initial forays. When I was hired to be Secretary of the Senate, it was Sheila Burke calling me saying, "Bob Dole wants you to do this." I knew that Bob Dole wanted me to do it but sometimes he would call, and sometimes he'd have somebody call me. The same thing happened with the FEC thing. I'd gotten a call in late May, just after Dole had announced he was going to resign, from JoAnne Coe. JoAnne was one of my predecessors as Secretary of the Senate, somebody I'd worked with politically for many years. We get along famously. We had talked about filling FEC vacancies for quite some time. Even though she was on Dole's campaign, she was Dole's political person and she was detailed by Dole to fill those slots, "Find me a couple of good people to go to the Federal Election Commission." So, JoAnne had been focused on this for quite some time.

It's actually hard to get people to go to the Federal Election Commission. One, it's seen as a dead end street. It's not seen as a career builder. Number two, it seems like just a horrible agency, and it really is in a lot of respects. So it was very hard to get people to go. I had sent people over to her to see if I could advance them as possible candidates and she usually said no because they weren't loyal enough to Bob Dole. After Dole announced that he was going to resign, she came to me and said, "I've talked with Dole and I think you should do the FEC. He wants to send your name forward." The first time she asked me, I said, "I really don't want to do this." Then I get a call a couple of days later and she said, "Dole really wants you to do this." I thought, well, I'll think about it. Initially, I thought I had a chance to stay as Secretary because I knew Lott and I thought maybe he'll want to keep me. I didn't really know. Then I got the impression clearly he was not going to keep me and I didn't know how long he was going to keep me. I called back and said, "All right, JoAnne, I'll let my name go forward." I was not enthusiastic about going to the Federal Election Commission. So, I wrote my own letter from Bob Dole to the President saying, "I nominate Kelly Johnston to go to the Federal Election Commission."

It really made sense for me because the one policy area where I'd had involvement was campaign finance reform. I'd worked in campaigns for years and years. I had Dole's confidence and I knew the wishes of the Senate with respect to the FEC, and I also cared about the agency more than the average person did. So, my name went forward and the White House began the process of vetting me. I had a meeting in the White House and they at first seemed very cooperative. But they saw from my resume, and I wasn't bashful about it, I'd been pretty outspoken in my Policy Committee days about fighting the administration on the health care front. Suddenly it got very cold about my nomination.

In addition, they took the time, as I knew they would, to go back and read some op eds I'd written. I had not been that prolific as Policy staff director, but they noticed one particular op ed they took great offense at. During the height of the Whitewater coverage in 1993, I'd written an op ed piece comparing or drawing similarities between what Spiro Agnew

experienced and Bill Clinton. It was a rather lengthy op ed in the *Washington Times* called "Clinton and Agnew." Basically it was comparing these two governors from small southern states who encountered what seemed to be some amazingly similar problems. I never drew any conclusion about what was going to happen to Clinton. I didn't make any judgments but they *really* took offense that I drew an inference to Spiro Agnew and that basically blocked my nomination inside the White House. They said there's somebody in the White House who just didn't like what you said and it wasn't going very far. I suspect it was Bruce Lindsey who was at the time the deputy counsel to the president. It was the counsel's office that cleared the nominations for the president's approval.

They operate in a very funny way because when my name went up, I went to the president and he signed off on me. Then they go through and they vet you, which I find very unusual. I would think that they would vet you first before they give you the official stamp of approval. I'd been approved at least internally by the president. I was told to keep quiet about that because it was only semiofficial, I presume. Then I was vetted and there was a hold on it. So I had to go to Trent Lott and say, "They've got me blocked." It was actually Sheila Burke who called me from Dole's campaign and said, "They've got a hold on you. They're breaking their promise to me you'd go through." John Hilly had promised Sheila that if my name went forward, they would sign off on my nomination.

Another dimension was FEC nominations are always sent up in pairs. There's always a Democrat nomination to go up with a Republican nomination. John McGarry and Joan Aikens, the two commissioners in that cycle, were paired together. By having me up there and be part of the process, they had to deal with what to do with John McGarry. He's in his seventies and he's been commission for, I think, three terms. His term already expired and many people thought he was not really up to the job any more. He's currently the chairman of the Commission. Finally Trent Lott got involved. I went to Trent Lott and said, "They've blocked my nomination." Trent Lott made it very clear as he had back in May when I told him Dole sent my name up, he thought I'd be great for the Commission. Mitch McConnell was thrilled at my going to the

FEC. He is probably the one senator who cares most about campaign finance reform and because of our relationship, really thought I would be an ideal commissioner, also somebody who would at least talk to him from the Commission because he has no relation with any current commissioner. Between the two of them, Lott called the White House and said, "You get him through."

Lott really pushed hard to get my nomination through and finally, on September 24th, after about three months of haggling and posturing between Dole and Lott and Dole and the White House, I was officially nominated. But the White House did something very clever. They sent my name up all by itself. They didn't bother to pair me with somebody. Well, that set me up to be used either for leverage or for the nomination to be killed. Now the Rules Committee to their credit, Senator Ford's staff director and Warner's staff director came to see me and said, "You know, this is unusual. We don't like this and it's going to force us to create a precedent. But we're willing to send your name up to the floor and we've told Trent Lott that." I was really impressed by that, that Senator Ford would be willing to go ahead and do that. Then Lott had it and in the last minute--and this is in the last week or two of the Congress--Lott in his deliberations with Daschle, and Don Nickles was involved in this process as well, trying to negotiate what to do with this stack of nominations.

You had all these judges, you had ambassadors, you had a whole variety of people and mine was in the mix as part of a deal to get some Democratic nominations through. Well, it got down to the point where it was my name and somebody else, Dole's chief of staff, Dan Stanley who was up for a job, I think, with the Postal Rate Commission. We were being traded for some judges and according to Trent Lott, Daschle wanted seven judges to go through in exchange for letting my nomination and Dan Stanley's go through. I think Lott offered three--that was what he said he offered--and Daschle said no. They seriously considered giving Daschle what he wanted because there was a lot of pressure from McConnell and others for my name to go on through, whatever it took, because they thought Clinton would get reelected and the judges would be confirmed anyway so why bother with this.

During this time frame, I'd also been approached about another job, which I now am in at the National Food Processors Association. That was a better job for me and I wasn't really enthusiastic about having a lot of judges traded for my nomination. It didn't mean that much to me to go to the FEC because I had something else to go to. I was never thrilled about going to the FEC. So, Nickles called me and said, "Well, how bad do you want this nomination?" I said, "Senator, I don't really want it that badly. I've never felt that I should be traded for judges." I just inherently felt that's not what I came to Washington for. I was very uncomfortable letting them trade a four-year term on the FEC for lifetime judges. It didn't make any sense to me and second, I did have something else I could go to I thought would be very valuable to the Senate as well as to my own family. I said, "Senator feel free to pull the plug on it. It's just not worth it to me." He went to Trent Lott and said, "Let's just drop it." And so my nomination died along with a lot of other judicial nominations there in the last part of the Congress.

The day after it died officially and we adjourned, I called up and told my new employer that I was happy to be starting some time in December. Lott was willing to resubmit my nomination but, frankly, I really didn't want to put my family through it. I'll tell you what, it was really, really stressful to go through a nomination process. I can see why people don't want to do it. It is intrusive, it is time consuming, and it is painful. First of all you have to go through a full field FBI investigation where your neighbors are not harassed, but they're interviewed about your life. Your former teachers are called, all your former employers are called. In a way it was kind of fun to get calls from old friends saying, "Hey, the FBI came and asked me about you." But it's intrusive. Even more intrusive was the questionnaire I got, not from the administration but from the Rules Committee. They went so far and wanted to know intra-family gifts that my family had received from other members of the family. A lot of that was confidential, but I was just stunned at what I had to turn around and produce: three years of tax records, tax returns both state and federal. I was just absolutely floored by the level of detail they wanted from me about my nomination to this agency that I thought had nothing to do with my ability to perform the job. As a result, I have become a big fan of some way to reform the nomination process. Part of it's purely political,

Congress in the advise and consent role, but it really was a very, very intrusive and, I thought, a little bit extraordinary.

RITCHIE: They want to avoid the types of things they had with Bert Lance and others in the past. You don't want to nominate somebody who turns out to have skeletons in the closet. On the other hand, by asking so many questions and getting down to such great detail, it almost insures that everybody's going to have *something* that can be held against them. Anyone who wants to sabotage a nomination can find something: they didn't pay Social Security to a nanny for some years. You wonder how can they find a happy medium between expediting a nomination and also making sure that those who are nominated aren't going to embarrass the administration or the senators who supported them.

JOHNSTON: That's right. It's a very painful process and I just didn't want to go through it again. If I couldn't be confirmed as a sitting Secretary of the Senate, even in a political year, I felt that it was going to be months and maybe never before I would get confirmed again. I already had been replaced as Secretary. I was in the Assistant Secretary's role at that point, more as a courtesy while I went through this process. I'm sure that Trent Lott was willing to keep me there for several more months, but it wasn't fair to my family. I had an excellent opportunity in a job that was ideal for me that was, I think, better for my family than going to the Federal Election Commission. I'm happy to have made the decision I did and happy things worked out the way they did.

RITCHIE: Well, given the past election and the controversies arising from it, it's probably just as well not to be at the Federal Elections Commission now.

JOHNSTON: Well, that was an attraction to me. I knew that was going to be a big issue. I knew that the federal election system had really broken down on the financial front and I really saw a wonderful opportunity, one as being vice chairman of the Commission and then chairman in '98, to supervise the audit process and to play a key role with the Congress in trying

to develop and devise some kind of a rational and enforceable campaign finance system.

I've got some very strong views about campaign finance. I err on the side of focusing on disclosure and deregulation and empowering individual citizens with a little bit more involvement in the process, not as far as McConnell--I'm not a true deregulation fanatic. On the other hand, I also see the inherent dangers in trying to clamp limits, which I think are unconstitutional, and have media and interest groups get in between the relationship of a candidate with the voter. In fact, now I've been invited to speak on that topic in the real world. I'm a little bit sad that I didn't go because I think I would have enjoyed it even though it would have been highly frustrating. It would not have been a career builder. It would have put me front and center on some real critical issues at a pretty important time. I think we're on the verge of making some pretty important changes to our federal election laws, need to, especially changing that agency. It's in desperate need of reform. I think it's almost at the point of needing to be abolished and recreated in some new form.

RITCHIE: Ironically, at one time the Secretary of the Senate was a member of the FEC.

JOHNSTON: Yes. Ex-officio non-voting member of the Commission, that's correct.

RITCHIE: But was removed. So, you would have been playing that role if the court hadn't intervened earlier to change that.

JOHNSTON: That's right.

RITCHIE: So, now what are you doing?

JOHNSTON: I'm the Executive Vice President for Government Affairs and Communications for the National Food Processors Association. It is a trade association representing the packaged food industry. It is a five hundred

billion dollar industry. Our association is ninety years old. It was created in 1907 to cure the persistent problem with botulism in canned foods. It was originally called the National Cannery Association as a result. It changed its name in 1977, probably is going to change its name again here in the next year to something else, and is predominately scientific and technical. We're operating in three locations. Our headquarters here in Washington are at 1401 New York Avenue, NW. We also have a laboratory in Dublin, California, near the Bay area, and also in Seattle, Washington. We have a food lab two blocks from the White House where I work and the bulk of our eighty-member staff are scientists and researchers and technicians. There are a very few of us who are not scientists. Predominately our role is to try to enhance and improve the industry's food science in the area of enhancing food safety. We do a lot of work with the Food and Drug Administration and Congress because we are a heavily regulated industry. And we get involved in all matters involving food safety and food science.

RITCHIE: Do you have any problems with the restrictions on lobbying?

JOHNSTON: I wouldn't call it a problem but it's definitely a challenge. There's a current one-year ban or cooling-off period. From the time I left being Secretary for a year until October 1, 1997, I'm not allowed to communicate to or appear before any employee of the Senate on behalf of anyone to request an official action. In other words, I'm not allowed to influence anybody on behalf of my employer or anybody else here in the Senate. It's a frustration because I have a lot of personal friends up here. I'm allowed to have friends. I can still go see friends. I'm allowed to be involved in campaign events and do political activities, that's all protected. But I'm not allowed to really do anything with anybody in the Senate including senators or committee staff or employees on behalf of my group or any other organization.

For example, there's one organization called the Asia Pacific Exchange Foundation, I may have mentioned them in prior interviews. They're a nonprofit group that basically helps to build relationships and educate policy makers on Asia. I'd gone to China in my previous role as Policy Committee staff director as part of a delegation. They have asked me to take some

senators over to China. I really can't do that until October 1 even though it's not because of my job. It's a volunteer thing but because it's on behalf of somebody requesting a senator to go to China on behalf of the organization would be a violation. It's a criminal statute so that's the one hurdle. I have no restrictions on the House side so most of my efforts on Capitol Hill have focused on the House side for now. There's another deadline that then takes effect after October 1 that there's a lobby ban on. Since I was number two in the office, I was the Assistant Secretary, I can't lobby or influence anybody in that operation until December 10 because I had again been moved to a different role in that office after I left being Secretary of the Senate. That only deals with that office and I have almost no dealings with the Secretary's office on an official basis so I have nothing to worry about there.

RITCHIE: This provision actually caused some candidates for Secretary to the Senate to decide not to take the job.

JOHNSTON: That's true.

RITCHIE: Because they didn't want to restrict themselves.

JOHNSTON: I wouldn't have this job, I would not have been Secretary had it not been for that rule. I may have mentioned that a good friend of mine, Rick Shelby, was a candidate for Secretary of the Senate under Bob Dole's leadership. It was that provision as much as any other, that discouraged him from taking the job, because his career had been in the area of lobbying. It would take away his livelihood after leaving the job if he had to live under that provision.

RITCHIE: Well, looking at it from those perspectives, do you think it's a reasonable restriction or do you think it needs to be revised?

JOHNSTON: No, I think it is a reasonable restriction. I think it's very reasonable. I think it's very fair and in my case the Secretary where I did have a strong relationship with senators, I have to watch it very carefully. There's a lot of gray area under the rules. And, with Senate Ethics Committee

it's not just any violations per se, it's actually in the appearance. For example, one thing I've been doing for years is moderating or co-hosting cable television shows with senators. It's not appearing before anybody, it's not trying to influence the Senate, I'm not being paid to do anything but the appearance of being on a program with a U.S. senator during this one-year ban has caused Ethics to advise senators: "You really shouldn't have Kelly on the show"--not because *they're* in any peril of a rule violation, but it puts *me* in peril of a rule violation. That's probably going a little bit too far and that part's frustrating.

But in reality, I think it's a good thing to have a cooling off period for a year with respect to the people here. Frankly, it's very tempting. It's really hard to separate from the Senate. You get very dependent on the information and the people and it's very easy to call and ask people to do things on behalf of your industry when they are people you just left working with. It does give you an advantage that's really unfair. So I've been very careful to follow that law, although I've had many temptations to cross the line. I think it's a good law and I wouldn't change it. My only fear is that there are efforts to go to a five-year ban or even a lifetime ban with respect to certain clients. I think that's ridiculous. One of the things I would have been forced to sign, had I been FEC commissioner, was a five-year lobby ban on my agency. Well, that was fine with me because I wouldn't go back to the FEC anyway after I'd left. But a *lifetime* ban on any foreign clients? That's a little bit unfair and I think that can be a little bit ridiculous so I hope they don't do that.

I think there's actually merit--and this is a view that many people would find offensive--there's merit to what I call, to what people call the revolving door. I think government and industry and the private sector have been well served by people like George Schultz, Casper Weinberger, and any number of Democratic executives who have gone back and forth between major positions and industry and public service. As long as you have that cooling off period of one year, as long as you have strict ethics rules where they focus on disclosure and conflict of interest rules that help control it, I see nothing wrong. In fact, I see it being very beneficial. I think efforts to continue to drive that wedge by going to a five-year period or lifetime bans only hurt the government.

A good example is Charlene Barshefsky who's up to be the U.S. Trade Representative, and I think is currently the acting Trade Representative. She's hit a stumbling block on a provision under law that prevents anybody who's ever had a foreign client from being Trade Representative. I think that's absurd. I mean it passed, it's a law you have to live under it, but it makes no sense. In my book it would help somebody who's had the experience of having dealt with a foreign government to be our Trade Representative. It gives you insights you otherwise would never have. Conversely, I want people who are regulators in government who have been in the private sector. I think that serves government well. It certainly serves the public well. Now you've got a situation where you've got people who get into a government track who have no incentive to go to the private sector and people in the private sector who have no incentive to go into the government. As a result you've got people who don't understand each other. You cause inherent conflicts. You get bad regulations. You get industry problems and enforcement. It just doesn't make sense. If anything, it shouldn't go any farther. The way the law's written now is good; I wouldn't change it. I would definitely repeal the executive order on the five-year ban and lifetime ban on foreign clients. I think that's absurd. I'd go to a one-year ban, maybe a five-year ban on foreign clients. That makes some sense, but I would never do a lifetime ban. I think that's going too far.

RITCHIE: You're countering the concept of expertise versus the idea that somehow you'd be co-opted.

JOHNSTON: Oh, it's ridiculous. It's an absurd thought. I mean you're telling people that they would sell out their government service for private gain. That's just nuts! Does it happen? I suppose it does. But you know what, it's going to happen anyway whether it's a one-year ban or a five-year ban for anybody that's that unscrupulous. It's really like some of the ethics rules now where the gift rules, which I think have also gone too far in most cases, not all, where there's this presumption that if I buy somebody a \$51 item for them and their spouse, that somehow I'm corrupting them and buying their vote. That's just nuts and that really is an insult to public officials that they could be bought for a dinner. Maybe at one time, but not now.

RITCHIE: You talked about the difference between the 104th and the 105th and that we're in the "hangover" period now. A lot of these reforms were enacted because people were angry. There were examples of misuse of the government and people perceived the situation as being perhaps worse than it is. Do you think there will be some sort of rolling back of these regulations if people are no longer quite as angry as they used to be?

JOHNSTON: I think that's part of it but I don't think that the perception of Congress has changed one iota, or for members has changed one iota, because we've passed these little self-punitive rules here in the House and the Senate. What's really changing the perception that Congress is getting things done that affect people personally: getting through a welfare reform bill, passing balanced budgets, doing things that people are really focused on. They could care less whether we pass these kind of rules. Are people concerned about perceptions of revolving doors and people profiting off their public service? To some degree, yes. But a five-year ban or even a one-year ban really hasn't changed those perceptions.

I would keep it the way it is and do more in maybe the area of disclosure. In fact, right now I had to file one more financial disclosure statement after I left the Secretary's office, a termination report that shows what my situation was and what the terms of my agreement were. I didn't have to show my salary, but I had to show who was hiring me, and when they hired me, and that's very valuable. I think what you'll see is through the committee process, the Ethics Committee in the House, maybe the Rules Committee in the Senate, Ethics Committee in the Senate, maybe increase some exceptions under the rules and redefine what some things mean under these new punitive rules. The House is more prone to maybe roll back a little bit more to try to be on equal terms with the Senate. That was the one big mistake last year on the ethics rules, that the House and Senate passed different rules for themselves. The House is more punitive than the Senate. I think that should be brought more into balance. The Senate rule actually didn't really change that much. It didn't really change my lifestyle very much, though, I really wasn't abusing it. The rules did help eliminate perceptions of

abuse that really were going on with some people but they really went a little bit too far in some respects.

RITCHIE: Well, are there any areas that we should have talked about that I haven't raised questions about?

JOHNSTON: We have covered every possible area, I think, and you've been a very patient interviewer with me because I've rambled through a lot of different changes.

Another thing that I think, that keys on the concerns that we had with having four secretaries in one Congress: there really has been a disturbing trend of more and more turnover in the office of the Secretary. I think that's an inevitable result of a change in Congress that changes more often. I do think for the continuity I do hope that we're going to enter into a period now where my successor or successors are going to at least be able to stay in their jobs for longer periods of time. We've been through enormous change in the last two or three years, so I think this turnover has been inevitable. But I hope that Trent Lott stays in the leadership for awhile. I hope that Gary Sisco remains Secretary for awhile. One, because I know he loves the job, but secondly because I think it's good for the Senate to have some continuity in the process. That's the chief concern I have.

There other concerns I have are, again, some of the reforms we talked about. Getting back to the topic you just raised, I do hope that we slow down. If we're going to do more reforms, like congressional accountability or other ethics rule changes, that we slow down a little bit and take smaller steps because the Congressional Accountability Act has much more potential to change the way we operate in both positive and negative ways than people realize. It's just getting started and I really hope the Senate will not move on any big internal reforms, with the exception of maybe campaign finance reform, for the next one or two Congresses and give a chance for all this to sort itself out and make adjustments in existing laws that affect everybody, rather than trying to punish itself to try to gain more confidence. That's one area where I think that's going to happen. I think the public being less angry, and

members now being more calmed down, the environment changing, will probably help that to some degree.

We've covered every other area. I can't imagine any other area we didn't cover. We covered pretty much every aspect of the job and all the major things that occurred during the last two years. I think we've pretty well done it. It's been a good experience for me to relive all this again. I wanted at least to be sure to mention the 1977 Hughes Commission. I've really been steering people towards that Commission. I've given copies to Greg Casey and to Gary Sisco and said, "Read that, it's good." I gave a copy to Greg first because he's the most impacted. I think Greg was very open to it, I think he saw a lot there. That's a good sign. If there was one beneficial change in this new type of leadership that Trent Lott brings it's that you've got people who are less territorial, who are looking out more for the well-being of the institution. As long as you're not trying to fire somebody, or really take away somebody's position, I think that people will be more amenable to those kind of radical changes. Greg Casey would lose eighty percent of his current fiefdom. On the other hand, acquiring power and building fiefdoms has really been to the detriment of the U.S. Senate, and I think Greg knows that. So I think that there's one real positive change that Senator Lott has brought people in who have that mindset, that we're not here to build empires and take care of ourselves. We're here to get things done for America and for the institution. That was part of the transition that I referred to before, and I think that's real positive.

RITCHIE: I suppose if real change is going to take place, it's going to happen when they're relatively new in their jobs and not once they've gotten settled in and comfortable with the arrangements as they are.

JOHNSTON: I think that's right.

RITCHIE: You have a new leader and a new leadership structure so this is probably the optimal time for change.

JOHNSTON: That's exactly correct.

RITCHIE: Well, thank you very much, this has been excellent.

JOHNSTON: Thank you, sir. You've had to listen to an awful lot of stuff!

[End of the fifth Interview]

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Appendix

THE REPUBLICAN POLICY COMMITTEE

Interview

Monday, July 29, 1996

RITCHIE: I was interested to see that you came out of journalism originally, and I wondered how that might have influenced your activities on the Policy Committee, because it seemed like in the 1990s the Policy Committee got more involved in public information, as well as policy formation.

JOHNSTON: It did. There's no question, and what promoted it, frankly was for all the years I had been in Washington, and especially the years working in campaigns, and in a policy environment, I never had heard of the Policy Committee. I was working for Senator [Don] Nickles when he chaired the [Republican Senatorial] Campaign Committee, and was told the end of the election cycle, "Well, gee, he's going to run for Policy chairman." I said, "What does that mean?" Then during the transition, after he left, I helped out with some of the orientation of the new members. Talking with them about that process, and talking to Senator Nickles' staff director, Rick Lawson, who was going over to run that as his chief of staff, and before that had worked on a subcommittee he chaired, I discovered that the Policy Committee was sort of a very bright but sleepy, backwater office, with enormous potential that had never really been utilized. They had been doing all this great thinking and great work, but giving it to people who didn't know how to use it.

My goal was to make it more of a force in the public arena, in a way that was consistent with its mission. It's mission has always been to try to help coordinate and facilitate policy and research for the leadership. I thought that's great, but there's a lot more here that could be utilized by others to get the Republican "message" out. So I just tried, without trying to add too much to its workload, to now do things that helped broadcast the message, which

really wasn't being done elsewhere in the leadership. To some degree it was being done by the Republican Conference, which has a media element to it, but in terms of reaching editorial writers and print media, people who give more thoughtful presentations to issues than the average reporter in television or radio, I really wanted to make sure they had access to the same kind of talent that we had in the Senate community.

RITCHIE: And your background was print journalism?

JOHNSTON: It was print journalism. A little bit of radio--I did some radio work back in college--but it was predominantly print journalism.

RITCHIE: But also the RPC started up a television program about that time.

JOHNSTON: Well, actually I have to give credit to the [Republican] Conference for that. It was their idea, but they involved us because the whole focus was to expand something that we had been doing every Monday (it used to be every Friday). We'd have a session with the staff director for Bob Dole, Sheila Burke, or somebody from their operation, and we thought we should expand this and try to get senators on, and take the vehicle and give it a new dimension. It was natural to involve Policy in that. When they approached me with the idea, I said, "We'd love to do it," because unlike the Conference we had the internal cable channel. It was a way to take the resource and make better use of it. Between myself and Will Feltus, my counterpart staff director for the Conference, we took the ball and ran with it. They produced it physically, but it was on our channel, and with me as one of the anchors. It got to be quite a successful program for the Republicans.

RITCHIE: The Republican party has always seemed to be more technologically advanced than the Democrats. I wondered if part of that came from operating in the minority for a long time they had to think of new ways to get their message out and to be more creative. But they got into direct mailing first, and any use of computers and electronic media the Republicans

always seem to be a few steps ahead. The Democrats are always running to . . .

JOHNSTON: Catch up.

RITCHIE: They are creating a studio right now modeled after the one the Republicans have had for several years. To what do you attribute this?

JOHNSTON: That's an awfully good question. It really boils down to the leadership. Somebody, either a senator or a staff director has got to see that as a great vehicle to use. I'm very technology oriented. You've seen that here in the Secretary [of the Senate]'s office. I think I was the first Secretary to turn on a computer, the first one to get involved in the Internet. So it was easy for me to keep that tradition going at the Policy Committee. I think you hit on it early, that the Republicans had to find ways to make up for their own lack of technology. It wasn't so much the Republicans were so good; I think Democrats just ignored it. They seemed to have much less interest in technology than did Republicans, at least before. I think that's all changed now. They've caught up. But in those days, back in the '80s and early '90s, we were just looking for more ways to get an advantage. We couldn't do it with more people or more money, we had to do it through technology.

RITCHIE: What part did Senator Nickles play in this? Did he have an idea of what he wanted the Policy Committee to do? Did he give you any suggestions of what he was hoping to see?

JOHNSTON: Yes, when he hired me for the job he wanted the Policy Committee to be a real force for political leadership inside the Republican leadership. He heard comments from his colleagues that the Policy Committee did stuff that nobody really used. He wanted to do things in a way that was more user-friendly that would really, truly help the leadership. One thing that we stopped during my tenure were these lengthy issue backgrounders that were very well done but not read. We thought, instead of wasting enormous time to put out a brilliant well-thought out policy backgrounder, let's convert to doing one or two-page papers that really focus on a particular theme

or message that a senator can and *will* use in the course a press conference or some other vehicle. We wanted to spend less time on in-depth substance and more time on things that would gain some benefit on a more short-term basis. That approach was not well received by some staff members who were used to, and very comfortable with doing a few things but knowing them very, very well and very thoroughly, versus trying to do many more things with less time spent on each item.

It was a realization--and Nickles shared this completely--that politics in the Senate was much like a football game with no time outs. Either you were on offense, running down the field, or you were on defense and having the ball run against you. We just didn't have the luxury of long-time periods when we didn't really crank out very much. We weren't really part of the daily process of getting things done and being a part of the debate on an ongoing basis. And Nickles wanted an operation that was more visible, that was more in tune and ingrained with the whole leadership operation, and something that when the Policy Committee did something it was noticed and it was used.

RITCHIE: Did that require changing staff? Did you have to bring in new people who could adjust?

JOHNSTON: We didn't have the luxury of bringing on new staff. The budget didn't go up that much. So what we did was--I took a look at the existing staff and the way it was structured and discovered that there were a couple of people who were being badly under-utilized. One young staffer who had no portfolio to speak of but was just a genius, was Eric Ueland. Eric now has moved up and is the assistant staff director for the Majority Whip's office now, but Eric was very knowledgeable, he read everything, was a speed reader, and had good political instincts. So we gave him a communications portfolio. That's the kind of reorganized staff structure--we added the communications portfolio and put him in charge of it, and it worked really well. We also made a point of utilizing--after [George] Bush lost in '92 there were a lot of very bright people from the administration who were unemployed, political appointees. We gave them the opportunity to come in as visiting fellows, to enhance their education volunteering their time to help out on projects. Other

people gave us time too. We had to make sure that we didn't cross any ethics problems, and we never did. But it was a wonderful way to utilize people's time because they were in between jobs, wanted to learn "the Hill," and wanted something to do, and were more than happy to help in some way. It was enormously helpful, in being able to do more with less.

RITCHIE: That raises a question: I noticed that in looking through the early history of the Policy Committee, when it was founded and the government agreed to pay for Republican and Democratic Policy Committee staffs, during the 1940s and the early '50s, there were staff members who were supplemented by the Republican National Committee and others. Do they still do things like that?

JOHNSTON: No. That's a violation. I'm not sure of the rule. The House Rule is rule sixteen. There is a prohibition against any outside subsidy of official responsibilities.

RITCHIE: So it's pretty separated now.

JOHNSTON: Very separate.

RITCHIE: I have another question about separateness. The biggest difference we found between the Republicans and Democrats is that the Democrats have always put everything under one hat. The majority leader usually was everything, chairman of the Conference and the Policy Committee and whatever. It's beginning to change a little bit. But the Republicans have always divided their leadership. It's always been somebody other than the majority leader or minority leader who heads the Policy Committee. My sense is that in different times in the party's history the Policy Committee has gone one way and the leadership has gone the other way. What happened when Nickles chaired it?

JOHNSTON: Well, Nickles has always been a long-time protege of Bob Dole. One of the things that Nickles also told me, aside from "Let's do things that people will use," and "Let's be part of the decision-making process and

part of what happens up here," but "never, ever break away from Bob Dole's leadership." He made it adamantly clear to me he would never put out or do anything that was at cross purposes with Bob Dole. That was not always true of the Policy Committee under John Tower's leadership and then under Senator [William] Armstrong's leadership. There were staff people there who would occasionally do things that would just drive the leader nuts. It's true that the Policy Committee has always had a separate leadership function and the Policy chairmen have had the right to do pretty much whatever they wanted, even in opposition to their own leader. That's always been one advantage the Democratic leader has over the Republican leader, that the Democratic leader has more power in his own caucus than the Republican leader does, among other things. In our case, it was Nickles, being a Dole protege, saying, "We're going to work with Bob Dole, not do our own thing here." He was never critical of Senator Armstrong or Senator Tower, but he knew that existed, and I think that's something that he wanted to try to correct under his leadership, and he did.

RITCHIE: So how does it work then? When you talk about creating policy, or formulating policy, who is calling the shots?

JOHNSTON: Well, we recognized where Dole was clearly down a particular path, and we knew that we could put out nothing that would be crosswise with that. Other than that, we pretty much had a lot of freedom to do whatever we thought we could do to help further the GOP agenda. Now, under Armstrong's leadership they did begin a series--actually, I would have to say it was John Tower who did this--they did have staff director meetings of all the committee staff directors and Policy Committee and other leadership staff. That continued under Armstrong and also continued under Nickles as well. But one thing that Nickles did was that on policy papers known as Legislative Notices, they began to clear them with the committee staff directors before they were published, so they reflect that operation. The Policy Committee technically consists of the committee chairmen or the committee ranking members, depending on when they're in charge. So we always made sure that our notices were cleared on items that were within the jurisdiction of a committee. So if anything we reached out not just to Bob Dole but also

reached out to the committee chairman to make sure that we didn't do anything that was going to be crosswise with the leaders, either on the floor or in the leadership itself.

RITCHIE: Did you find that there were some senators who used the services more than others?

JOHNSTON: Yes. Usually the younger members used the Policy resources much more than the older members. That was especially true under Nickles because one thing that we did as well--one of the other leadership posts in both parties is the Campaign Committee, and one thing that I did with my political background was call on the Senatorial Committee and said, "Look, if you've got candidates in town who would like to come and talk to us, and get some briefings on policy issues, we're happy to do that. We can't do anything for them--that's a violation of our charter--and we won't do anything that's going to hurt an incumbent of either party, but if somebody in town would like to ask questions and take advantage of the wealth of talent, please do." When they were elected, they knew right away where to go for help. People like Paul Coverdell and other senators who had a history of working with the Policy Committee knew to call us. The reason we did that was I remembered when I was with the Campaign Committee I would have loved to have had the Policy Committee help brief my candidates on issues, because they need that kind of help when the campaigns start. Again, they did not engage in any overt partisan activity. But it really helped the candidates, and therefore it helped the Policy Committee to brief these people early, to make them aware of their resources.

An older member is more knowledgeable, with older staff who are set in their ways, who had never really had a history of Policy Committee use, or they had committee staff elsewhere that pretty well over time evolved their interest in one or two or three issues. Younger members, however, tend to want to be involved in more issues, to find ways to be more aggressive on the floor and in committee. We find that they really do like to use the Policy Committee much more than the older members. I think that's even more true now than before.

RITCHIE: I've talked to people in the party Conference who said the same thing about when they brought in television initially. It was the younger members who used it, and a lot of the members didn't bother, didn't see the purpose in it. They had done their business fine for years without it. I also suspect that the senior senators have more other sources of information, because they are chairmen of committees and have committee staffs, whereas junior members would embrace information that came in from the Policy Committee. But would the Policy Committee tailor material for individual senators, or do they do things for the party as a whole?

JOHNSTON: We offered mostly things for the party as a whole, or for groups of senators. We always availed ourselves, and often time individual analysts would help individual senators with their projects. The Policy Committee's real work is primarily at the staff level where an analyst is a resource available to another LA, who may not be experienced, to work out draft language, which is follow-through on an idea and putting something into final form. That's where the real work was. Yes, they were primarily a resource to a member at that level.

RITCHIE: It seems to me that it was just at that time that the party started to designate senators to be point men on issues.

JOHNSTON: Yes, that's right.

RITCHIE: So that there would be an identifiable senator who was the one who would go on *McNeil-Lehrer* to talk about gays in the military or whatever the particular was. I wondered if they then used the Policy Committee?

JOHNSTON: Well, that was part of Nickles charge of "being in the loop." In other words, if someone needed something, they always knew the Policy Committee was where they needed to go to get something resolved. Or if the leadership was trying to craft a floor strategy on some issue, to always be sure to involve the Policy Committee. That wasn't always the case before, but now they were clearly a part of the team on almost any issue, whether it

was staff putting together a group of coalitions or even helping senators' media appearances.

RITCHIE: You mentioned earlier the question of the potential of the Policy Committee. From the very beginning, from the 1940s when the committees were created, there have been these questions: are these Policy Committees living up to their potential? And almost every decade the answer is no. Well, it seems like in the last five years, at least, they are doing so much more than they ever did before.

JOHNSTON: Yes, that's correct.

RITCHIE: Do you think they have reached their potential? Or do you think there is still more to go?

JOHNSTON: I really do think they may have reached their potential, given existing resources and technology. Their potential will continue to grow as technology is introduced. I know one thing that has happened since I left was the Internet. They've got their own Website now. They have really managed to catch up with the opportunities in terms of what they can do to maximize their potential. Some senators would say they could do even more. Some senators miss the old days when they could really craft and be behind the nucleus of a huge idea, like a Kemp-Roth bill. In some respects that has suffered while they focused on the day-to-day battles on the floor, or the public arena. Some senators say there is more potential to come up with the great new programs and ideas that lead to a Kemp-Roth or some other proposal. So while that potential has suffered somewhat, I'd say in so many other areas, making the public aware, the media aware, being plugged into things that happen on Capitol Hill, they really have met their potential to a large degree. They probably have gone from about eighty percent capacity to about ninety-five percent in the last ten years.

RITCHIE: Now, is there some potential danger in this . . .

JOHNSTON: Yes.

RITCHIE: In the sense that if the Policy Committee gets out front, will the senators resent the Policy Committee being ahead of them on an issue?

JOHNSTON: Only to the extent that they take something that some senator. . . well, the danger is in this business senators always get the credit for the work. They are always out front. If the Policy Committee on its own, or its staff members, get too visible individually-- for example, if staff members are writing the op-eds versus the staff members drafting the op-eds for senators. If the staff becomes too visible or the credit for a proposal goes to a staff or a committee staff versus a senator or the leadership, yes. I don't think that's happened or is it in danger of happening.

RITCHIE: Do you see under the new leadership, under Senator [Larry] Craig, any changes coming down the pike?

JOHNSTON: Larry Craig was one of the senator who did make use of it. There will some changes to reflect his personal priorities and style, but really I don't expect any major differences. The Policy Committee has been kind of a conservative committee since John Tower became chairman, and I think Larry Craig is a continuation of a conservative style, and a conservative activism that was begun by John Tower and continued by Armstrong and Nickles and now under Craig.

RITCHIE: After fifty years it sort of has found a niche.

JOHNSTON: The Policy Committee was nearly dead in the early '70s. It didn't really do anything and really wasn't a player at all. John Tower brought it to a certain level. Armstrong raised it to another level, and Nickles really I think sent it off into the stratosphere. And Craig is now continuing that. It will be up to him to decide where it goes from here.

RITCHIE: One other question I wanted to ask about was the luncheons, which started about 1955, having these Tuesday luncheons. What functions are these luncheons and why have they been retained?

JOHNSTON: They've become very important. They've come and they've gone. I recall stories back in the early '70s when very few senators would feel any obligation to go. There were times, I'm told, where maybe two senators would show up: John Tower and maybe Howard Baker, and that would be it. Somewhere in the '70s or early '80s, it became the only

time during the week that all the senators were together behind closed doors, just themselves and a very small handful of staff, just to talk through things and get informed. With the schedules the way they are up here, it's the only time that a caucus of senators can get together during the week. So it really serves a very vital purpose, and now they almost never get through a lunch where every senator gets as much time as they want to raise a some issue or to respond to something.

RITCHIE: Is the purpose of the lunch for the party leadership to get the senators to fall in line, or is it to hear what the senators are interested in and where they are going?

JOHNSTON: Yes to both. They serve both purposes almost exactly. It varies. Dole occasionally would use it--if Dole really, really wanted to rally the troops on something, he would call a conference in his office, he wouldn't use Policy for that purpose. I've detected with [Trent] Lott that he's more inclined to use the lunch for that purpose. Lott along with a lot of the more conservative, activist senators, have wanted to try to use the Policy Committee to create more of an agenda for the lunch, where for Nickles and all the previous chairmen it was more of a free-for-all. You presided over a fairly open meeting. There was no real agenda because it was the senators' chance to raise whatever they wanted after the leader spoke first. That's still true now, but it's starting to change or evolve. If there's going to be any change under Larry Craig, this is going to be the biggest area of change, how those meetings are done.

RITCHIE: It seems to me one of the most starting things about the Senate in the 1990s is that parties--at least the Republican party in the 103rd Congress--stuck together more than ever. Traditionally, people would say we don't have party votes in the Senate. Rarely do we have straight party votes.

And yet, I don't think Bush had a single veto overturned because the Republicans stuck together on cloture motions and veto overrides. To what do you attribute this party unity?

JOHNSTON: It's like a whole series of backlashes. I mean, the Democrats' partisanship and their style in the 104th is kind a retribution for what the Republicans did in the 103rd, which if you were to ask Republicans, remembering the Policy lunches, were a retribution for what a lot of senators thought happened to George Bush in the 101st and 102nd Congresses. I think, from my perspective, after the '92 election there was a real feeling among GOP senators that George Bush had really been screwed by the Democratic leadership in Congress. That he offered his hand when he was inaugurated and tried to work with Congress and George Mitchell in particular ran a very partisan, very hard-edged leadership. While Byrd was often accused of that, you heard Republicans comment on the fact that "Gee, we miss Robert Byrd," after the first couple of years of George Mitchell, and how George Mitchell's singleminded focus was the defeat of George Bush. I think they felt that they needed to do to Bill Clinton what George Mitchell and the Democrats had done to George Bush. And they had to begin with being cohesive. That if they didn't stick together they really would be irrelevant. That really emboldened them, they knew their backs were against the wall.

RITCHIE: It's remarkable, because the parties have always *wanted* to stay together, but senators have always had independent minds. If you have enough who are willing to break away they can become a very potent force, just four or five swing votes. You had that when [Ronald] Reagan was president with the "Gang of Six." But that has happened in the last few years.

JOHNSTON: Well, Mitchell's very partisan style in the perception of a lot of senators really did more to bring Republicans together than anything the Republicans themselves did.

RITCHIE: I remember Bush said, "I extended my hand to Congress, and they bit it."

JOHNSTON: Definitely.

RITCHIE: For me, it's fascinating watching all the changes. I remember when Senator Mitchell was complaining about not being able to get past the cloture votes, and the press corps was calling and asking "What's changed?" I said that the rules of cloture hadn't changed, what changed was the minority was voting together. That was where the story was: that every member of the minority was voting against cloture. The Democrats don't have that right now, since there are Democrats who will move away from the fold, but the Republicans--I don't think there was a single one of George Bush's vetoes that were overridden.

JOHNSTON: Just one. There was one on cable deregulation. That was the only one and it was late in his term, too.

RITCHIE: That's still a phenomenal record, considering how many bills that he vetoed. Whereas Gerald Ford had many of his vetoes overridden, I think twelve times. That's the big change from the '70s to the '90s. Do you feel that the Republican Policy Committee played an important part in that cohesiveness?

JOHNSTON: They did--they more responded to it and maybe helped feed it as much as they did. They can't claim credit for directing it. But they were part of it. It was one of the places they turned to. I recall back--well, I'll say this: in the 103rd Congress, the Republicans lost a huge resource in the administration. Now they realized that they didn't control committees, they didn't control the White House, and therefore they had to rely on the Policy Committee for a whole lot more for expertise. Those comments were more from the older members than new members. People who really made use of being able to call EPA or call Commerce or call Defense and say "Send over your experts." They couldn't do that anymore. So they really felt they really had to rely on the Policy Committee a whole bunch more than they did before. It really upped the task. Well, that was our challenge in '93 and '94, and I think we met it.

RITCHIE: Well, that's a change also, because in the past the Policy Committee would always say if they were in the minority they couldn't set the agenda, so there was *less* of a role for the Policy Committee in the minority.

JOHNSTON: Well, we felt--Nickles I know felt--that the one advantage to losing the administration was you were free. We no longer--I was there during Bush's last year and the year afterwards, and with Republican presidents, whether it was Nixon or Ford or Reagan or Bush, we had to kind of toe the party line. Our job was really pretty easy, there was not much creativity involved, except finding a new way to say the same old thing that they were saying down the street. With having no control of Congress or the White House, we were free to do whatever we wished. That was a pretty emboldening thing for the Republicans and for the Policy Committee. It was also an enormous responsibility. Whatever we did we had the main responsibility for it and we really had to make it work on our own.

RITCHIE: That was noticeably different from the attitude in the past. But Lyndon Johnson is always credited with being one of the strongest majority leaders and he *never* had to deal with a Democratic president while he was majority leader. I suspect that's something that true for any majority leader who doesn't have to deal with a president of his own party.

JOHNSTON: Well, Bob Dole, you've seen his comment that the best job in town is be the majority leader when the other guys control the White House. That's the way Mitchell felt probably, and Dole felt that way when he was leader.

RITCHIE: In crafting this history, what suggestions do you have for those of us who are trying to figure out and explain the history of the Policy Committee?

JOHNSTON: In a sense, it's an evolution of the politics that was institutionalized by the Legislative Branch Appropriations bill. Politics has really changed, and gotten much more intense, much more involved, and is playing a much bigger role in legislation than ever before. It's always been

there, of course, but it's really intensified dramatically. So now politics is not just getting people anymore. That function still exists and it's still over in the Senatorial Campaign Committee, apart from Capitol Hill. But clearly with polling and the need to try to influence public opinion, either with groups or with the nation as a whole, the Policy Committee serves as that element. It's like the Senate's version of the White House Communications Office. In a sense, what their job is is to try to get the word out publicly. The Policy Committee's great potential is to try to be that outreach arm, education arm, for their policy to the public. So their role will probably evolve even more dramatically. I think it's important both to educate the Hill and to fit that policy role. It's part of the overall change in the political atmosphere in Washington as well as Congress as well as the country. While they are not involved politically in a campaign sense, they are political.

The public, and the populace as a whole, is older and more sophisticated. Issues and policy play a bigger role in things than they ever used to because there's more information out there. The Policy Committee's role really is part manager but part facilitator and part glider of that change. The Policy Committee plays a real vital role in keeping the senators together and helping them as a group get their "message" out to the public, either by working directly with the senators, by making sure that what they say is consistent, or doing things on their own to education the people who do report this information--editorial writers and those kinds of people--in showing how the Senate's role is adapted to the changes in the way people think and address issues and how issues are fought out in the public arena. It's pretty interesting stuff, I think. It's not like we're sitting here saying this is the last plantation. I mean, we really have evolved and changed, whether it's technology or how we've adjusted to meet the demands of the political marketplace. It's really been a evolution. This is where they may be going next.

RITCHIE: I think Robert Taft would be very surprised if he came back and took a look at what happened to his brainchild!

JOHNSTON: I think he'd be pretty pleased. I think he'd be maybe stunned at how intensely political it's gotten and how difficult it is to get much through here anymore. I think he'd be really pleased and impressed with how--I mean, Robert Taft was in a league all by himself. He was the brightest man up here. There was nobody smarter than Bob Taft in the U.S. Senate. I think he'd be surprised at the quality of senators today. We've got people who are not only very bright but they're smart, they know their stuff, and they're articulate, and they're aggressive. It's not just a handful, it's now all of them. There's very few, maybe one or two exceptions, but these are pretty aggressive folks. They're here for a reason, they're here to accomplish things and do things. With the whole marketplace being what it is, people now pay attention. This fishbowl has been magnified dramatically. It's like getting back to what I said before, this is really a game of football with no time outs. It may even be a more intense game when there are no time outs, it constantly keeps going. If you're going to win, and you're going to prevail, and if you're going to be successful you've got to always keep going. I think Taft would see the intensity and say, "Yep, they've kept up." I think he'd be impressed with how we've done that.

RITCHIE: He was an intellect, but he was also a very strong partisan, so I suspect he would have been very pleased to see how the mechanism was working.

JOHNSTON: The Senate is much more ideological than it ever has been, on both sides, liberal and conservative. He'd be very comfortable here today, I think. He might be shocked at the pace, but he'd be very comfortable with the ideology, the research, the brightness, and the desire to fight that public fight. He'd be very comfortable in the Senate today I think.

RITCHIE: That's an interesting observation. True, I think. Well, thank you, this has been great. You'll find much of what you said incorporated into the Policy Committee history.

End of the Appendix

Deed of Gift

I, Kelly D. Johnston, do hereby give to the Senate Historical Office the tape recordings and transcripts of my interviews between July 29, 1996 and February 10, 1997.

I authorize the Senate Historical Office to use the tapes and transcripts in such a manner as may best serve the educational and historical objectives of their oral history program. I also approve the deposit of the transcripts at the Library of Congress, National Archives, Senate Library, and any other institution which the Senate Historical Office may deem appropriate.

Effective immediately, the tapes and transcripts may be opened for the Secretary and the Assistant Secretary of the Senate, on the condition that the contents of the tapes and transcripts are not to be copied, cited, revealed or disseminated in any form without my express written authorization.

Effectively immediately, the Historian or his designee may open all or parts of the tapes and transcripts to anyone except employees or representatives of news organizations or any other non-governmental entity which distributes information that is made available to the general public, with my express written permission, and on the condition that the contents shall not be quoted, cited, or otherwise revealed or disseminated in any way without my express written authorization.

Under all other conditions, the tapes and transcripts are sealed until January 1, 2009. In making this gift, I voluntarily convey ownership of the tapes and transcripts to the public domain.

Kelly D. Johnston

Accepted on behalf of the
Senate Historical Office by:

Richard A. Baker

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Preface

A political sea change of historic proportions took place in November, 1994, when Republicans won the majority in both the United States Senate and House of Representatives for the first time in over forty years. Since World War II, Americans had become accustomed to long periods of divided government, with Republican presidents confronting Democratic congresses, but it was a decidedly rare occasion for a Democratic president to face a Republican Congress. The 105th Congress saw repeated clashes between Republicans in Congress and President Bill Clinton that resulted both in a shutdown of the federal government and in sweeping legislative programs, most notably the welfare reform bill and an agreement to work for a balanced budget.

Beginning with the first congressional campaign he worked for in 1978, Kelly Johnston had devoted himself to the election of Republicans to Congress. He served on the staffs of both the National Republican Congressional Committee and the National Republican Senatorial Committee, as well on the staffs of three Republican representatives. When Democrats returned to the White House and controlled the majorities in both houses during the 103rd Congress, from 1993 to 1995, Johnston was staff director of the Senate Republican Policy Committee, where he helped coordinate the Republican resistance to President Clinton's economic stimulus and health reform proposals. The defeat of the health plans contributed to the Republicans' landmark victory in 1994.

Senator Bob Dole, the new Majority Leader and the frontrunner for the Republican presidential nomination, designated Johnston to become Secretary of the Senate in 1995. The Senate then formally elected him to the post. As Secretary, he oversaw much of the day-to-day operations of the institution, from the Senate floor to the support staff in a variety of offices, ranging from the Disbursing Office to the Stationery Room. Having long worked to make Congress more accountable, Johnston as Secretary of the Senate became a key official in implementing the Congressional Accountability Act of 1995, which significantly changed employment practices on Capitol Hill. He also became closely involved in a major revision of lobbying registration.

Kelly D. Johnston was born in Edmond, Oklahoma, on August 27, 1956, to Carl D. and Carol Elizabeth (Robbins) Johnston. He attended the University of Science and Arts of

Oklahoma, where he won election as student body president. After graduating in 1976, he worked as a reporter and editor for the Donrey Media Group in Oklahoma from 1976 to 1978. Johnston's family had been Democrats, and as a college student he had worked for Oklahoma Senator Fred Harris' campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination. But as many traditional Democratic areas in the southeast and southwest began to shift party allegiance in the 1970s, Johnston became a Republican. In 1978 he worked for a Republican candidate for Congress from Oklahoma, who was not elected. That experience, however, brought Johnston to the attention of Representative John Paul Hammerschmidt, an Arkansas Republican, who hired him as his news secretary. Johnston moved to Washington and worked for Hammerschmidt from 1980 to 1981. He then served as communications director of the National Restaurant Association from 1981 to 1983.

On May 26, 1984, Kelly Johnston married Adrienne Annette Cordova. They later had two sons, Gavin and Garrett. At that time, Johnston had returned to politics as a field manager for the National Republican Congressional Committee, working with Republican representatives from New York to Oregon. In 1987 he became administrative assistant to Arizona Republican Representative Jon Kyl. Senator Don Nickles of Oklahoma persuaded Johnston to join the National Republican Senatorial Committee in 1989. He handled campaigns mostly in the South, but also in South Dakota and Nebraska. After the 1990 election, Johnston became deputy assistant secretary of Transportation for public affairs, under Secretary of Transportation Samuel Skinner, in the Bush administration.

Johnston returned to Capitol Hill in 1992 as staff director of the Senate Republican Policy Committee, then chaired by Senator Don Nickles. He emerged as a familiar face around the Capitol as the anchor for a weekly cable television program to inform Republican senators and staff about upcoming issues and legislative scheduling. When Republicans resumed to the majority, Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole appointed Johnston as Secretary of the Senate in 1995. However, when Senator Dole resigned the next year to run for president, the new Senate Majority Leader, Trent Lott, preferred to select his own team as Sergeant at Arms and Secretary of the Senate. Senator Lott invited Johnston to continue as Assistant Secretary of the Senate to assist with the transition and to await his appointment to the Federal Election Commission. But his nomination became embroiled in an end-of-the-session contest between the parties over judicial nominations, and he was not confirmed. By

then, Johnston had accepted the post of executive vice president for government affairs at the National Food Processors Association.

In July 1996, while he was Secretary of the Senate, Johnston agreed to give an interview to the Senate Historical Office to provide information for a fiftieth anniversary history of the Senate Republican Policy Committee. That interview is included as an appendix to the larger oral history that he participated in after stepping down as Secretary of the Senate. In these interviews, Johnston shares his observations of the people and the political movement that changed the national political scene so dramatically in the 1990s.

About the Interviewer: Donald A. Ritchie is associate historian of the Senate Historical Office. He received his Ph.D. in history from the University of Maryland. His books include *Press Gallery, Congress and the Washington Correspondents* (Harvard Press, 1991), *The Young Oxford Companion to the Congress of the United States* (Oxford University Press, 1993), *Doing Oral History* (Twayne, 1995), and *History of a Free Nation* (Glencoe, 1997). He also edits the *Executive Sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (Historical Series)* (Government Printing Office). A former president of the Oral History Association and of Oral History in the Mid-Atlantic Region (OHMAR), he received OHMAR's Forrest C. Pogue Award for distinguished contributions to the field of oral history.

Transcribed by Michele Manon