

ROBERT C. BYRD

United States Senator from West Virginia, 1958-

Oral History Interviews

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Senate Historical Office

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About the Interviewer: Dr. Richard A. Baker served as Senate Historian from 1975, when the office was established, to his retirement in 2009. He received his PhD in history from the University of Maryland College Park. He is the author of numerous books, the most recent of which, *The American Senate: An Insider's History* (with Neil MacNeil) was published in April 2013.

ROBERT C. BYRD

Interview #1

Thursday, December 13, 1989

BAKER : To begin, and to set it up a little bit, it strikes me that in the thirty-one years that you have been in the Senate that the Senate has undergone more changes than any other comparable time in its history. More profound changes. And yet, one can also make the argument that the Senate is still, in essence, what it was in the eyes of the Framers of the Constitution.

Among the 1,792 people who served in the Senate, you're 19th in terms of overall seniority, according to our lists as of right now. And you certainly never went in your knowledge of the institutions inner dynamics as far as any fair observer would have knowledge.

You're a particularly good person to focus on on how it is a person comes to learn the operations of a United States senator and becomes effective within the institution. And I thought a good way to begin would be to start with your election to the House of Representatives in the 83rd Congress. Arriving in 1953, Joseph Martin was Speaker of the House; and Sam Rayburn was the Minority Leader. Party control had just switched to the Republicans. I'm wondering if you could give me a sense of what it was like to be a brand, new member of the House of Representatives in January, 1953--a junior member of a minority party.

BYRD: Well I felt a great thrill at becoming a member of the House of Representatives. When I was in high school, it never dawned on me that I would be interested in politics; and so it was a new world of thought, the idea of becoming a member of the Congress of the United States. And so, although I had already served in the West Virginia House of Delegates and West Virginia Senate, and had been exposed to legislative bodies at the state level, the exposure was not deep because our sessions in those days were only about two months out of every two years. But it was still an introduction to the legislative branch at a different level.

Becoming a member of the Congress was to me an honor that, of

course, I'd never really given much aforethought to and even less the thought that I would even aspire to be a member of Congress. It was a much larger forum than the two legislative branches at the state level.

While I was in the House I served on the House Administration Committee, which was a housekeeping committee. I believe that was my assignment in my first two-year term. And then I was assigned, I believe, in the second term to the Foreign Affairs Committee. As a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee I traveled a bit overseas. As a matter of fact, the first time I'd ever gone overseas was as a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee. And on that first trip we traveled in an old constellation, a four-motored plane that was rather slow in comparison with today's flying machines. We traveled around the world; and we were gone 78 days, I believe. I traveled as a member of the Subcommittee on the Far East. Congressman Clem Zablocki was chairman. And on the subcommittee trip, in addition to Mr. Zablocki and myself, were Marguerite Stitt Church, Ross Adair, John Jarman, Mr. Wigglesworth, and Dr. Judd.

This was quite an education for me. Quite an experience. Traveling overseas and going around the world.

BAKER: Was this your first time out of the country?

BYRD: It was my first time out of the country. I didn't, as I recall, make a lot of acquaintances in the House. My interests in the House were mainly those parochial interests that impacted on my congressional district. I represented the old Sixth Congressional District in West Virginia. And coal and coal mining were the backbone of the economy in my congressional district. So I was very interested in legislation that impacted on coal, and the miners, and their families. I was interested in coal research at that time, and I recall that members of my delegation were like myself in that respect. We were opposed to the imports of residual oil which cut into the coal market. And I busied myself with legislation that created the Office of Coal Research. And the legislation I introduced, I think, had some success in that regard. That legislation, of course, was cosponsored by others from West Virginia.

In those days there were probably about 135,000 coal miners in West Virginia when I first went to the House of Representatives in January, 1953. So many people earned their livelihoods working in the coal mines.

BAKER: Your committee assignment was the Foreign Affairs Committee. Were you able to use that committee as a forum to deal with the whole problem of imported oil, residual oil, and to

advance your interest in coal research?

BYRD: No my committee assignments didn't fit into my economic and political needs in West Virginia, I recall.

BAKER: How did you overcome that problem?

BYRD: I worked my district very hard. I went back to my congressional district very often. It was said by some of my detractors that I would be a one-term congressman. So I worked hard to put that notion to rest. And I gave my constituents good service. Prompt service. Prompt attention to their problems. And I, therefore, became pretty strongly entrenched in that congressional district.

BAKER: Thinking of the West Virginia delegation at that time, I was curious about the nature of your relationships with the two United States senators, Harley Kilgore and Matthew Neely, who were the two senators in the 83rd Congress. How did you work with them?

BYRD: I did not have a close relationship with either of our United States senators at that time. However, my acquaintance with Senator Kilgore was closer and more warm than was my relationship with Senator Neely.

Senator Kilgore was from Beckley, the county seat of my home county of Raleigh. That naturally positioned me more in his sphere of acquaintance than was the case with Senator Neely. Senator Neely was from the northern part of the state, and in those days we thought in West Virginia in terms of one senator from the North and one from the South. Senator Kilgore, then, and I, one might say, were practically from the same hometown. It also seemed to me that I had an easier relationship with Senator Kilgore.

When I came to Washington, he advised me to enter law school. I did not at that time possess a degree, a master's of arts or bachelor of arts degree; and I had acquired about 70 hours of college work prior to coming to Washington and intended to finish my work toward a bachelor of arts degree before going on to study law. I had, for quite some time, acquired a desire to get a law degree--not that I expected to practice law; but I simply wanted to get the degree. I wanted the kind of reading and class experience and learning that would go with a degree.

Senator Kilgore advised me to enroll in law school upon my

coming to Washington. He said, Forget the other. Go down and enroll in law school. So I did that. I enrolled at George Washington University and built up a number of hours. I believe 22 or 24 hours. And then switched to the American University Law School, the American College of Law. I found after I'd enrolled at George Washington University that I would not be able to acquire a law degree because I didn't have the prerequisite master of arts or bachelor of arts degree. So the Dean of George Washington University advised me to go down and see Dean Myers at the American College of Law.

I found upon talking with Dean Myers the requirements were the same. I should have a prerequisite degree. But Dean Myers, out of his kindness, gave me a chance. He gave me a challenge. He said, I'll tell you what we'll do. You have 70 hours of straight A work. College work. If you can complete the required courses in law with no lower than a B average, I will recommend you for an LL.B. degree. So that was a challenge, and it gave me a chance to get a law degree.

So over a period of ten years, going to law school at night, I managed to finish the required courses with a, I suppose, a high B average or a low A. Anyhow, I was on the honor roll. Graduated cum laude, and President John F. Kennedy presented to me my law degree in 1963. I was 45 years old at that time. He was the commencement speaker and delivered the famous foreign relations

address on that occasion.

BAKER: During that ten-year period, to focus on your House years, it would seem that you were following two, separate intensive courses of study: the law curriculum and the congressional curriculum.

BYRD: That is true. One reason I could not finish my required work in the study of law within a shorter period was the fact that I had to run for reelection every two years when I was in the House. And so during each election year, I would take no courses; so I concentrated very heavily on my district, on keeping my political fences mended, and on serving my constituents--and serving them well. And then when I was elected to the Senate, of course, with a six-year term, I was able to concentrate my classes and finish up my law school work.

BAKER: In the House of Representatives I'm interested in the resources you had available to you to do your job. What was the nature of your office staff in the House?

BYRD: I think in the House when I began in January, 1953, I had five members of my staff. The reason that I recall that it

was five members was because I had four counties in my congressional district. And so I thought it would be politically astute to have a member of my staff from each of the four counties. So I had four counties and five staff people.

It wasn't a large staff. And in those days we didn't have all of the electronic equipment that we now have. I operated the mimeograph machine, the robotyper, the typewriters, and did everything in the office along with my staff. The mail was not as heavy in those days, and the press activity was not as intense as it has become. So I didn't have a lot to work with. We worked long hours. We had the congressional library, of course, to help us with research and background for speeches. And I would call on the National Coal Association to help me with research in connection with speeches concerning coal--coal production, coal marketing, coal research, and so on.

BAKER: Could you turn to the Democratic Party in the House for assistance to support your objectives?

BYRD: As I recall there wasn't all that much assistance to be gotten. I was one of the new members of the House. As I recall I was probably about--not the youngest--but, it seems to

me, I must have been about the 17th youngest in age when I went to the House. And in the course of six years I didn't build up a lot of seniority. I never came to know a wide swath of members. I wasn't interested in the House organization, the leadership, or anything of that kind. I was interested in working my district, and serving the people of my district, and continuing to remain in office from that district.

When the opportunity came to run for the Senate, I took advantage of the opportunity. It was a chancey one. The incumbent senator was running for reelection, and incumbents were hard to defeat then as they are today.

But mainly my work and interests in the House revolved around my own four counties in my district. One of my counties was Kanawha County, the county in which the state capital is located. So I had a big district from the standpoint of population, mainly located in the coal-producing area in southern western West Virginia. That was my main and total interest when I was in the House of Representatives. I was there three terms.

BAKER: Transferring our attention over to the Senate, your decision to run for the Senate--even though you suggested one reason is you wouldn't have to run for reelection every two years, what were some of the other factors you had in mind when you made

that decision?

BYRD: I would be in a position, then, to serve the whole state of West Virginia. I looked upon it as a step upward, and the ambition of almost every person is to move upward in whatever line of work he is engaged or whatever career he or she has chosen. So I saw it as a broader field, more interesting forum, and looked upon membership in a smaller body as being advantageous to serving the people of West Virginia. I knew a senator could do more as one person for his state or his people than a member of the House could do in such a large forum. And I had become a successful politician by that time. I was a good vote catcher; therefore, I desired to come to the Senate. To me, that was the pinnacle of a successful political career--to be a United States Senator.

BAKER: Shifting, then, your focus from the district to the state and planning your campaign, you must have realized it was going to be more expensive to run a statewide race.

BYRD: Well, in those days we didn't have much money. I didn't have much. I didn't have much money when I broke into

state politics. I can remember in the House of Delegates from Roy County in the election of 1946, mainly by the use of my violin, taking it around to various gatherings--church meetings, fraternal organizations, family reunions, boy scout meetings, PTA meetings, and so on. So I mainly had broken into politics on the strength of my drive, and ambition, and willingness to work hard and using my violin as an attention-getter.

And it was the same when I went on to become a state senator. I branched from being a delegate, representing one county, to being a West Virginia state senator; and, thus, representing two counties, and representing four counties in the U. S. House of Representatives. I then was serving one-sixth of the state's population. So, this was at a time before high-priced consultants and television became the prime medium in politics.

Senator Randolph, who had been a member of the House of Representatives some years before I became a House member and who had lost an election and become an executive with one of the airlines, decided to run for the Senate at the same time I decided to run. And there were two Senate opportunities. I ran against Senator Chapman Rivercomb, the incumbent, for a six-year term; and Senator Randolph ran against a Mr. Hoblitzell who had been appointed to fill the unexpired term of Senator Matthew Neely who died. And so Senator Randolph ran for the two-year term.

The two of us ran on a combined war chest of something like \$50,000 or less.

BAKER: Combined?

BYRD: Combined. We teamed up since we were not running against each other, and we were running for two separate seats. We ran as a team. In those days campaigning consisted mainly of traveling around the state, speaking in court houses--at court house rallies, speaking in union halls and before rallies of coal miners, and speaking at chamber of commerce meetings and meetings of civic organizations, and going to things of that nature.

Senator Randolph had acquired a pretty well-known statewide name, and I had acquired a well-known name in the southern part of West Virginia where my district was. And, of course, my name had gotten round the rest of the state as well. I had taken on a few speaking engagements outside my district.

So, from the standpoint of dollars and cents, we didn't spend much in those days on the election. I took my fiddle around to the court houses. It again gave me the opening. I didn't campaign on the fact I played the violin, but I used that to attract their attention after which I'd make my speech; and they'd remember me by virtue of my playing the violin. It was a way of projecting a personality that struck up a kindred spirit in my

listeners in the audience.

I ran the head of the ticket, I believe, that year. My margin over the Senate incumbent was in the neighborhood of 117,000 to 20,000--somewhere along in there, I believe. So I came to the Senate. I was sworn in my Vice President Nixon in that very large class of 1958.

BAKER: In running for that election, did you feel you had some help from outside--particularly from the Democratic Party nationally?

BYRD: I didn't have much help. The Democratic Party nationally did put a little money into the campaigns of Senator Randolph and myself. I recall that former Senator Clements, Earl Clements--I believe he was the Chairman of the Senatorial Campaign Committee--was able to allot some money for my campaign and for Senator Randolph.

Now, we bought billboards. Billboards were a pretty familiar way of campaigning in those days. We bought billboards around the state; and our campaign motto, I believe, was--let's see--Byrd and Randolph will build West Virginia in the United States Senate.

We did a little radio. We did some radio ads. We did some newspaper ads. Very little television. I don't think I had any television spots, as we call them. I had one, or two, or three television buys in which I would appear and talk about my campaign. We didn't have the spots and the polish, the sophisticated ads that we see nowadays. I just went before the people on television and talked.

I remember that the first television set that I ever owned was after I became a member of the House of Representatives here. I went home one evening, and my wife and our two daughters and I were sitting in the living room after we'd eaten dinner. We called it supper back in the area where I grew up. And my wife said, Well, what do you see about the room here that's new. And I looked around, and there was a television set. It was black and white. Black and white set. My first television set.

BAKER: At the time of your election in 1958, the Washington Post described you as a hard-working young man who laid out a political timetable for himself and has moved up the ladder on schedule. And nearly every article that has appeared has described your career since then has used that same theme. Very careful deliberate planning--step by step--which leads me to ask you about how you confronted the United States Senate in November

of 1958, particularly from the time of your election in November until January 6, 1959, when Richard Nixon administered the oath of office to you.

BYRD: First of all, I didn't have any timetable, really. These myths get started, and they build around one; and they never quite shake themselves off. In politics, one just has to seize the opportunity when it presents itself or it may pass him by.

It was that way when I ran for the House of Representatives. The opportunity came to me when the congressman from the Sixth District, Dr. E. H. Hedrick, decided he would be a candidate for governor; so he did not run for reelection. And I was attending Marshall College, now Marshall University, in Huntington at the time and had just enrolled in the spring semester. And the opportunity came. Well, I seized it. Obviously, I couldn't have had that on a timetable because it was somewhat unforeseen.

But I seized the opportunity. I knew that if I didn't run at that point I might not have an opportunity again--or certainly for a long time--to run for the House of Representatives. At the time I was elected to the United States Senate, I was a member of the House. And, as I recall, I had a kidney stone. And during the

election I had a kidney stone attack. So I spent part of the time between the election and the swearing-in at the hospital--at Montgomery in Fayette County, West Virginia.

Interestingly, I should mention that the very first day that I walked into my office as a member of the House of Representatives, the House wasn't in session, but I had an office assigned to me. the very day I went to the office I had a kidney stone attack and had to be taken to the hospital over in Bethesda. The very first day. So, between the time of my election to the Senate and the swearing-in, rather than having the little episode concerning the kidney stone, I was making arrangements to move from the House office building over to the Senate; and, probably, I'm sure that I was back in the state some, getting around and shaking hands, and thanking people in the various new counties that I was going to represent. I was going to have fifty-one new counties--additional counties--over and above the four that I had represented when I was in the House. So I spent a good bit of that time getting around over the state. That's about the way it was.

BAKER: You found that you have all these new responsibilities, much larger number of constituents. Did you also find that you had additional resources to reach that larger constituency?

BYRD: I had a larger office staff. I had more space.

BAKER: Tell me about how you went about moving into your office space in what is now called the Russell Building.

BYRD: Yes, I moved into the Russell Building. It was called the Old Senate Office Building. Of course, I had a House staff that was familiar with casework; so that House staff moved to the Senate with me. It was a matter of adding to the staff, and I had a very competent administrative assistant. And she went about adding to the staff, and bringing to the office additional people, and setting up shop in a larger space.

BAKER: It must have been a rather chaotic time. There was a huge turnover in the Senate as a result of the election in the Senate in 1958--thirteen new democrats.

BYRD: Yes, yes. It was a like a new door opening to wider horizons. When I came to the Senate there were great old stalwarts. I guess Senator Joe Clark would call them "establishment" people. Senator Russell, Senator Stennis, Harry Flood Byrd, Sr. of Virginia, Lister Hill, Jim Eastland, Sam Ervin, Russell Long, Senator O'Mahoney, Lyndon Johnson. Those were men

who had been here a long time, and they loved the Senate.

BAKER: When you came to the Senate were you acquainted with any of those men personally at the time you arrived here?

BYRD: No. As a member of the House, I did not get acquainted with members of the Senate. I had met Lyndon Johnson on one occasion after I had been elected to the Senate and while I was still in the House following the election. I came over and met Senator Lyndon Johnson. I can remember he was in the middle aisle of the Senate Chamber when I met him. And he had his coat pockets bulging with memoranda and pieces of paper. His trousers looked like they were too long for him, as I recall. But I didn't know the other senators.

BAKER: Did he call you over to have an appointment, or did you on your initiative go over to look him up?

BYRD: I probably went on my own initiative to see Lyndon Johnson. I don't recall who introduced me to him. It may have been Bobby Baker. I'm not sure.

BAKER: Well, there was some business to be transacted between you and the Majority Leader at that time. The most important, I suppose, being committee assignments.

BYRD: Yes. Senator Randolph and I visited with Lyndon Johnson in the Majority Leader's office. Senator Randolph requested, as I recall, the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare and the Committee on Public Works. I requested Appropriations. That was the only committee I really, really wanted. I was advised it would be very difficult to get on that committee.

BAKER: What led you to conclude that was the committee you wanted?

BYRD: Because I felt I could do more for West Virginia. I felt that on that committee I could do much for West Virginia, and that's what I wanted to do. I wanted to get things for West Virginia. I was told it would be hard to get on that committee. I was advised to go see the chairman who at that time was the Senator from Arizona, Senator Hayden. And, also, I was told I

should see Senator Russell, the senior senator from Georgia. I believe he was the senior senator at that time. I don't remember. I don't believe Senator George was in the Senate when I came.

BAKER: He left.

BYRD: So, also, of course, I knew I had to see Senator Johnson, the Majority Leader. I can recall that Senator Randolph and I went into Senator Johnson's office, and we sat down; and he talked with us for a few minutes. Asked us about our committee assignments. Why we wanted them and so on. And, for some reason or other, he worked it out so that both of us could get what we asked for. Senator Randolph got the two committee assignments he wanted, and I got on Appropriations. That was thirty-one years ago. And I used that committee assignment to good advantage for West Virginia all through those years.

BAKER: Did you feel at the time that you were paying any price to get on that particular committee?

BYRD: I didn't feel that I was paying any price, but I felt grateful to Majority Leader Johnson for his putting me on that. I suppose it's fair to say that he in considerable measure put members on committees. Of course, he did it with the help of the establishment of senators. I'm sure he talked these things over with Senator Russell, Senator Hayden--Hayden being the chairman of the committee. And, if they had a meeting of the minds, that pretty much decided it.

The Steering Committee at that time was smaller than the Steering Committee is today, I think. And Johnson and the Southern senators dominated it.

BAKER: Did you know who the members of the Steering Committee were?

BYRD: I probably did at the time. It may have been that I contacted several of them. So I was grateful to Majority Leader Johnson for being assigned to that committee. It wasn't a price. It was a matter of gratitude, and I became a strong supporter of Lyndon Johnson because he had arranged for me to get the committee assignment that I wanted.

BAKER: Tell me a little bit about the nature of your meetings with him. I get the impression that one didn't go in and just sit down and have an extended conversation with Lyndon Johnson.

BYRD: Well, I think that's probably true of most majority leaders. I don't think one just went in and had an extended conversation with Mike Mansfield.

When I became majority leader, I made myself far more available to my colleagues than either Johnson or Mansfield did as far as I could tell, although Mr. Mansfield's office was one in which any senator could walk and certainly see Senator Mansfield. But I'm not so sure that anyone was as openly available to senators as I was. If I was in the midst of a sandwich, I put the sandwich aside. So the senator didn't have to make an appointment with me in advance, he just walked in the door. My staff showed him in.

When I was a new member, and I was very well aware of the importance of seniority here, I didn't attempt to push myself in on anyone. I pretty much was willing to wait my turn.

BAKER: Had you ever met Richard Russell before you became a member of the Senate?

BYRD: I don't recall ever having met Senator Russell before I became a member of the Senate.

BAKER: Can you tell me a little bit about how you approached him--the nature of your early relations with him?

BYRD: I never called Senator Russell "Richard," or I never used a nickname. Other senators called him "Dick." Dick Russell. I never could bring myself to do that. And I served with him from January, 1959 until he died on January 21, 1971; and I never called him anything other than Senator Russell in all that period. He was the one senator that I never addressed by his first name or nickname.

BAKER: Why was that?

BYRD: That was because I respected him so much. I just

felt that he was kind of the father of the Senate, and I didn't feel that I had any right to call him by his first name. I didn't feel that I should presume to do that.

BAKER: What were some of the characteristics of his that inspired your respect?

BYRD: He was very cool, clear-headed senator. Patrician type. And he was highly respected for his knowledge of the rules and precedents--for his good judgment. He didn't go out of his way to develop a friendship or acquaintance. But he was easy to talk with. He seemed to be someone that I could ask for advice, but, at the same time, someone whose time I would not want to presume on. He had an excellent vocabulary. Very articulate, although not an orator. He was a learned man. And someone who exuded confidence--self-confidence--and assurance, self-assurance. He was a Christian gentleman. He didn't seem to go out of his way to give advice; but if one sought his advice, he showed interest and would give it.

BAKER: As part of your education as a United States Senator, he clearly was an important teacher. You're suggesting,

I think, that he had a certain major role as a teacher. He was there and ready for you. What kinds of things would you look to him for, for instruction or for guidance in?

BYRD: I would inquire of him about the customs of the Senate or about the rules. Or get his judgment on an issue. Get him to express himself on an issue as a way of informing myself in coming to a conclusion in my own mind on an issue. That was about it.

BAKER: I'd like to focus a few minutes on the Appropriations Committee and, particularly, on Chairman Hayden. You got what you sought--a seat on the committee. How did you go about learning how to operate within the confines of that committee under the direction of Chairman Hayden?

BYRD: Well, I had assignments to certain subcommittees. And within those subcommittees I would work with the agencies. For example, on the Subcommittee on the Interior, I would look into the Forest Service. Its budget. Get acquainted with the chief and other people in the Forest Service. In West Virginia we have a very large forest--the Monongalia National Forest. And we

have small portions of two other forests. And so I thought in terms of having forester labs, having some forester laboratories built in West Virginia as a way of developing our forest products' potential. I'd talk with the Forest Service people--get them to go with me to West Virginia and travel around a bit and determine whether or not they could justify a forest laboratory in West Virginia. And in this way I was able to get a forest laboratory in Mercer County. Early on after becoming a senator. And forestry sciences laboratory at Morgantown where the university is located. I would talk with the people in the Fish and Wildlife Service and in the Department of Interior in regard to coal and coal research.

I began to put places on the map in West Virginia. Put projects on the map in West Virginia. Forestry labs, fruit and berry labs, coal research laboratories. I worked with the Army engineers providing flood control measures for West Virginia which was prone to be victimized by floods. Get large reservoirs built. Get locks and dams on the Ohio River. Improve our transportation potential there; and in that way, build up the infrastructure of West Virginia. I was successful in that Appropriations Committee in doing that.

Now I was also successful being put on the Banking Committee at first along with Appropriations. I didn't particularly want to be on Banking, but I took it as a second committee and later

shifted to the Armed Services Committee. When Lyndon Johnson became vice president, I took his seat on the Armed Services Committee; and again, there was Senator Russell who was Chairman of the Armed Services Committee at that time. Again, it was through Senator Russell's influence, I think, that I was able to get the Armed Services Committee. And, of course, Johnson had some say in that, too, since he just went off that and became Vice President. I'm sure he put in a good word for me as well. So I took his seat on the Armed Services Committee.

And there I was able to get some things for West Virginia: new armories and reserve facilities. Also the radio receiving station at Sugar Grove in Pendleton County, which was a naval facility. So it's been through those committee assignments that I've been able to do things for West Virginia.

BAKER: Looking at the Appropriations Committee for a minute, what kind of staff support did you get as a senator on that committee? You were dealing with some very complex issues.

BYRD: Well, they had good, experienced staff on the Appropriations Committee. The staff doesn't shift with the coming and going of senators. Staff stays, becomes very expert in the

agencies that are served by the particular subcommittee. And the staff was always nice to me--cooperative and helpful. Tom Scott was, I think, the director of the staff when I first came to the Senate. And other subcommittee staff on all the subcommittees on which I served were accommodating. Helpful. So they taught me the ways of going after projects for West Virginia.

BAKER: Did you have a sense of the staff that they would be equally helpful to minority members, or was there a minority staff at that time?

BYRD: There were some minority staff; but for the most part, staffs weren't partisan. They were professionals, and they served both democrats and republicans alike. Of course, each party had its own immediate staff. But they were and are real professionals.

BAKER: You were also assigned to the Rules Committee in 1959.

BYRD: Yes. We were given two major committees and one

minor committee. I think they were referred to in that fashion. So I went on the Rules Committee. I chose it as one I'd like to be on. I may have had some advice from Senator Russell in that regard at that point.

BAKER: In the House you'd been on the House Administration Committee.

BYRD: Yes, the first two years I was on House Administration which didn't give me anything for my district. Then when I went on Foreign Affairs, that didn't give me anything for my district. But it was a major committee.

BAKER: But there seems to be a suggestion of a sense of curiosity about the institution from the perspective of the House Administration Committee and then over in the Senate side the Rules and Administration Committee. Did you feel that in 1959 when you were starting out here?

BYRD: Well, that was not the case when I started out in the House. I was just given that House Administration

Committee. I didn't ask for it. In the Senate, as I say, I probably got some suggestions from Senator Russell about going on the Rules Committee here. Otherwise, I probably would not have shown much interest in that either.

My interests in the Senate when I came here were just as they were in the House in promoting the interests of my state. And that's why I wanted on Appropriations; why I was glad to get on Armed Services. So Rules Committee would not have been one that I would necessarily have asked for as a self-initiated action.

BAKER: Well, this might be a good point for us to take a break today.. Tomorrow we can turn to the party mechanism.

BYRD: Very well.

Senator Robert C. Byrd

Interview #2

December 15, 1989

BAKER: This is the second series of interviews on December 15. Senator, I'd like to go back for a minute, if I could, to the 1958 election. I have read that, when you were considering running for the Senate, John L. Lewis of the United Mine Workers had his own favorite candidate for the position; and I just wondered if you could tell me a little bit about that.

BYRD: Very well. I was a representative of the old Sixth Congressional District for six years, extending from 1953 to 1958 inclusive of both years. In 1957 I began to explore the possibilities of running for the United States Senate because Chapman Revercomb, the incumbent of the post, would have to run again if he chose to.

So, in 1957 in the Fall after Congress had adjourned, or after the House had adjourned at least. In some of those years I think the House adjourned, but the Senate stayed in session quite

some time because of civil rights legislation or some such. My memory isn't exact on it.

Anyhow, I was over in Wheeling. I was scouting around in other congressional districts to measure my strength in those districts--or at least measure the interest in my possibly becoming a candidate for the United States Senate. I was in Wheeling, which is in the northern panhandle of the state, one evening; and I got a call from a man by the name of Robert Howe. He was the United Mine Workers liaison with the House of Representatives. He called me from Washington and reached me in Wheeling. I was put up at a hotel there. And he asked when I would be back in Washington. I told him it would be quite some several weeks. I didn't know just when. He said, well he would like to talk with me because he had a message to deliver to me from "The Boss," meaning Mr. John L. Lewis. And I said well I won't be back in Washington for awhile. I will be over in Romney, which is in the eastern part of the state, one evening either that week or the following week during which I would be speaking to a civic club in Romney. Mr. Howe indicated that he would be willing to drive over to Romney. It would be a pleasant drive. It's about a 110 or 115 miles from Washington, and he would put up at the hotel there in Romney; and he would bring his wife along so she could do some sightseeing. And he and I would then meet there in the hotel during the afternoon of the date on which I was to

address the civic group.

On that particular day I met with Mr. Howe in Romney. He got right down to business. He said that The Boss, Mr. Lewis, wanted him to apprise me of the fact that Mr. Lewis was going to support William C. Marland for United States Senate in the campaign of 1958 and that he--Mr. Lewis--didn't want me to run for the Senate. He wanted me to run for the House again. According to Mr. Howe, Mr. Lewis felt that I had a good labor record; and they felt they would be happy to support me for reelection to the Sixth District congressman's office.

Mr. Howe said that Mr. Lewis was so supportive of Mr. Marland that he--Mr. Lewis--would come into West Virginia and campaign for Mr. Marland if necessary. They felt that they owed him a great deal, so they were committed to support him in the Senate race against Mr. Revercomb.

I said, Well, you paid your debt to Mr. Marland. That's the reason Mr. Revercomb is a senator now. I'm not sure I'm recollecting this right.

They supported Mr. Marland against Mr. Revercomb, I believe it was, in the race in 1956 to fill the remaining two years of the term that had been, I believe, that Senator Kilgore died. And Mr. Marland had lost. I said you supported him, and he lost. Now we have Mr. Revercomb in there. I should have my chance at it.

Well, he was sorry; but that was the message from the Boss. Mr. Lewis would come down into West Virginia and campaign for Mr. Marland if need be. I said, Well, I will be back in touch with you.

So that night after I had spoken to the civic organization, I made my way from Romney southward into Beckley. And on the way a few miles south of Romney I entered Grant County, Petersburg, the county seat. There I stopped my car and went to a telephone booth. The snow was up around my ankles, I remember. It was cold in that telephone booth. I called my wife back in Arlington. We lived in Arlington while I was in the House. She answered the phone. I said, well, Erma, I've made my decision. She said, What decision? I said to run for the United States Senate. Well how did you come to make it? I said, Mr. John L. Lewis helped me to make it. He has sent a message to me not to run for the United States Senate stating that he will be supporting Bill Marland, former governor; and, of course. she knew who Bill Marland was.

He will come down into the state and campaign for Bill Marland, so I am going to run. I then went back to my car, drove into Beckley. I got into Beckley, I suppose it may have been one or two o'clock in the morning. The next morning I was up early calling some of the big politicians in southern West Virginia-- county chairmen and so on. I called Judge Robert D. Bailey in Pineville, Wyoming County. Told him I was running for the

Senate. I had been a member of the state senate and represented Wyoming County in that state senatorial district so I knew Judge Bailey well. And he was well known all over the state. He was a well known Democrat. He had run for governor. He was well liked.

I then called Sidney Christie in McDowell County. At that time, McDowell County had one of the largest populations of any of the counties. It was a coal-mining population. Great coal mining county. And the Christie brothers pretty much were the political kingpins in that county. So I called Sidney who was the most active of the Christie brothers. Told him I was a candidate for the United States Senate. I then called some others, and the big consensus was, Well go to it. We're with you.

Then I had a press conference and announced I was running for the United States Senate against Chapman Revercomb, that former governor Marland would be a candidate against me, and that John L. Lewis, chief of the United Mine Workers, would support Mr. Marland and would come into the state and campaign for him.

Well, as it later developed, Senator Neely died; and the other Senate seat opened up in 1958. And John Hobbits was appointed by the governor of West Virginia to fill that unexpired term which was just several months. With the opening of this other Senate seat, Mr. Marland chose not to file against me but to

file in that race. And former congressman Jennings Randolph, who had also been making some inquiries around, jumped into that race. And the former president of the West Virginia Senate, McVickers, I believe, filed in that race. Anyhow, there were several. I had one person from Fairmont, the northern part of the state, to run against me.

Anyhow, the coal miners had, in the meantime before the second seat opened, been quite aroused by the news that John L. Lewis would oppose me for the Senate. They were sending telegrams to Washington here.

When that second door opened for a Senate seat and Mr. Marland decided to enter that race, that relieved the situation between Mr. Lewis and myself. I then was contacted by Bob Howe again and Jim Mark, who was the UMWA liaison officer, I believe, with the Senate here. I knew him prior to that. So those two gentlemen suggested I go down and see Mr. Lewis and smooth this whole matter over because there was no confrontation now that was going to take place, and he was going to be supportive. It would be good for me if I went down and smoked the peace pipe.

So I went down. On that occasion I met with Mr. Lewis, and Mr. Mark, and Mr. Howe. Nobody else in the room. And Mr. Lewis complimented me on saying that he was going to support me. But he said, Young man you announced when you were going to be a

candidate for the United States Senate, you announced that Bill Marland was going--our meeting took place prior to the primary election. So all of us were still out there running.. Bill Marland, Jennings Randolph, and others were active in the Senate race; and I was still running in my own with a little-known candidate from the northern part of the state against me. Young man, you announced that you were going to be a candidate for the United States Senate. You also announced that William C. Marland would be a candidate against you, and you took the liberty of announcing that I would support Mr. Marland and that I would come down in your state and that I would campaign for him. And I want you to know, young man, that I'm in the habit of issuing my own press releases; and I resented your presuming to make a public statement involving me. And his eyes twinkled, and they were very blue; and they seemed to bore right through one.

I listened very respectfully. And when he'd finished, I said with great respect I'd always admired him. He was a great labor leader, and my foster father was a coal miner; and I had married a coal miner's daughter. I could remember when there was no union in the coal fields--how the men had to work from daylight to dark to eke out a very meager living, and how I'd seen the union come into being and how he, Mr. Lewis, and the union had done a lot to advance the welfare of the miners and to improve their conditions, and the wage scales, and so on. And I respected him as a great

leader.

But, I said, I'm a politician; and when I decided to run--or considered running--Mr. Howe here came over to West Virginia and informed me that you had a message for me that you would not support me if I ran for the Senate. You wanted me to run for the House again for which you would support me, but that you were going to support Marland in the Senate race even to the extent of coming to West Virginia and campaigning for him. And I resented the message that you sent to me by Mr. Howe. And so I decided to run. I knew that that would elevate the visibility of my race. I was running to win. And running to win I had to play all the cards I had. And that was one of my trump cards announcing that Marland was going to run against me. Announcing that you would support him. Announcing that you would campaign for him in opposition to my candidacy. So I would have been foolish to have sat there and not publicized these developments. They gave the kind of visibility to my race that brought me a lot of support from people who, otherwise, probably wouldn't have even known I was running.

So I ran to win. He said, well he was going to support me for the Senate; and he knew I would make a fine senator. That was the end of that meeting.

On the way back up to my office on the House side, Jim Mark

and Bob Howe said to me, I remember Jim Mark saying it in particular. I feel that you made a real impression on Mr. Lewis. And, he said, I think it's a very favorable impression because he likes somebody who has the courage to stand up. And, he said, you demonstrated that. You did it in a nice way. You weren't disrespectful at all. He said, I have a feeling that when I get back I'm going to hear some nice things said about you.

That afternoon he called me on the phone. Mr. Mark called me and said, well it's just as I supposed. I came back, and you really made a hit with Mr. Lewis. He likes you. And that was a great thing you did coming down and meeting with him. Glad you all got everything smoothed out now.

Well, Mr. Lewis kept his word. He supported me, and he supported Mr. Marland; but Jennings Randolph won the nomination in the other Senate race. Then Jennings Randolph and I, then, were candidates together for the United States Senate.

Mr. Lewis became very much a supporter of mine and spoke favorably concerning my future. And my experience with him was somewhat similar to my experience with Mr. George Tippler who was the president of the United Mine Workers District Office 29 in Beckley. But that race didn't have anything to do with the Senate.

BAKER: Is that the first time you'd ever met John L. Lewis in that face-to-face?

BYRD: Yes, that was the first time I ever met him.

BAKER: What was the nature of his support during the 1958 campaign?

BYRD: There was no monetary support. They didn't, as I recall, supply any monetary contributions to the candidates they supported. It was just the support of the organization. They got the word out through their United Mine Workers Journal and messages that came down from Mr. Lewis to the various UMW district offices, and from there it filtered on out to the rank and file.

BAKER: In the last session we asked you some questions about life in the Senate in 1959 and 1960. Learning to come to grips with the institution. And we spoke a bit about Lyndon Johnson as majority leader and his style. A lot has been written about him and how he controlled the Senate. And people kind of blissfully look back to the old days.

You have said on a number of occasions that Lyndon Johnson could never get away with his style of leadership in the Senate of modern times, particularly the Senate of the late 1970s and

1980s. I'd like you to explain what you had in mind when you said that.

BYRD: Times have changed. At the time Lyndon Johnson was majority leader the big issue--one of the main issues before the whole country, not just before the Senate--but before the Senate was the civil rights issue. And the Southerners were very united. Southern democrats represented the whole Confederate States of America and the border states in the United States Senate when I came to the Senate and when Lyndon Johnson was majority leader.. So you take states like Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, Mississippi, Virginia, and some of the other southern states which today have at least one republican senator in each of those states. At that time, they were solid democratic.

So there was a solid democratic vote which backed Johnson. Johnson was a southerner, and Senator Richard Russell of Georgia was Johnson's mentor and the strength back of Johnson's candidacy. As you see, there were 22 to 26 or more votes counting the old confederate states and then the border states, the democrats. And they pretty much stuck together on the civil rights issue. And they stuck with Johnson. The Westerners went with the Southerners in return for support for water resources projects and so on that the Westerners were interested in.

There was a strong, solid, united block of votes that Lyndon Johnson had backing him as majority leader. These were senators, too, who had been here a long time--who had great seniority. And they were representative of what might have been looked upon by some observers as the Establishment. Establishment senators. It was then that there were those who thought of an Inner Club and an Outer Club in the Senate 'cause these were the Establishment senators, and Johnson had their solid backing.

He was able to get things done because he had that solid backing. He didn't have many young turks. When the 1958 class came in there was a group of young, younger senators from around the country who didn't necessarily fit right into this Establishment. So with the coming of Senator Proxmire, who was here a little ahead of the '58 class, and some of the erstwhile mavericks, for want of a better word--non-Establishment senators, like Joe Clark of Pennsylvania.

As these new senators came in, Lyndon Johnson was kind of on his way out. He went out in '60. In 1960 a new breed was coming in. And then with the passing of the old civil rights issue from center stage in 1964 and 1965 and the ushering in of a different type of senator and a different type of senatorial campaign in which big money, high-priced consultants, costly TV ads would play a major part, the whole scene began to shift away so that the old, senior senators of Johnson's day began to retire, die out, and

move out of the scene--move away from the scene. And the younger senators moved in.

Then came the years when republicans represented the southern states in many instances--at least broke into the South. Why, Lyndon Johnson was no longer there. But had he been there, he wouldn't have had two democrats from North Carolina, two democrats from South Carolina, two democrats from Florida, two from Mississippi, two from Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee, Virginia, South Carolina, Texas. He wouldn't have had them. They were the mainstay of his votes. The backbone of his support was that Southern, solid, united homogeneous block of votes. And not only had a lot of that become contaminated, to use a word not in a pejorative sense, with the republican senators, but a lot of young breeds--young senators, who had a knack at the six- or ten-second news bite. They were young. They were telegenic. Television had moved to center stage. High-priced campaigns and all this. So you had a much different sense of the Senate. It wasn't as disciplined. It was not as self-disciplined. Nobody disciplined the Senate. It was self-disciplined; made up of senators who were self-disciplined and who came here because they loved the Senate. They didn't necessarily dream of passing on to anything else. They wanted to continue to be senators.

In that kind of climate Lyndon Johnson was a unique man in a way. He had a lot of drive and was very ambitious and smart,

politically. He was a strong leader. But he was a strong leader in circumstances in which he could operate well.

His other mentor, Sam Rayburn, was Speaker of the House of Representatives so the two of them worked very much together there. And he had big majorities in the Senate. He didn't operate like I do with the 100th Congress with 54 to 46 majority. He had bigger majorities.

BAKER: Particularly when you came in 1959 with that large new class of democrats.

BYRD: That gave him a big majority.

BAKER: I'm wondering if it didn't also give him a big headache because, all of a sudden, as you've suggested, there were some new senators.

BYRD: Not so much early on because we were just getting our feet wet. The Bill Proxmires and the others who, as new senators, were willing to stand back a little and look and listen and learn. But it was in later years when Johnson was gone from the Senate that we saw the newcomers who didn't enter into a Senate of self-disciplined senators belonging to a large united block of senators.

And there were many different issues before the Senate which didn't weld democrats together so much. There was greater likelihood of democrats defecting and voting republican. But we had large majorities and could afford to have defectors.

It was also at a time of hope with John F. Kennedy coming in. The country had not long been out of World War II, and it was growing. There was a need for, and room for, new social programs. Johnson came along at the right time. He was the right man at the right time.

BAKER: I once asked Senator Russell Long who, you know, came to the Senator in 1949, when did he first feel that he was a senator. When did he first feel that he could operate as a senator. And he said 1961 at the time you are talking about. And I think a lot of that had to do with the fact that the majorities in the House and the Senate were of the same party as the presidential majority and a feeling there had been a long time without very much action. You came just at the right time to pick up on some of those things.

BYRD: Yes. That's true.

BAKER: There is some contrast that had been drawn between the last two years of Lyndon Johnson's leadership and the early

years of Mike Mansfield's leadership. And one way to focus that contrast is, perhaps, to look at the democratic conference sometimes called the democratic caucus. It was about that that Senator Proxmire made a famous speech in 1959 lamenting the total disappearance of the caucus as an instrument for decision or even information. Well, you came; and you sat in on the meetings of that caucus starting at the beginning of your term. And then you saw it under Senator Mansfield's leadership.

I wonder if you could give me a sense of what those meetings were like under both leaders.

BYRD: Conferences were held very infrequently under Majority Leader Johnson and not with a great deal more frequency under Mr. Mansfield. But Mr. Mansfield had more conferences, and he adopted the theory that if any single senator wanted a conference he'd have it.

So we had more conferences under Mr. Mansfield. I'd have to say considerably more conferences. Mr. Johnson seldom had a conference. Mr. Mansfield, however, operated for the most part through the policy committee; and he would have these regular policy committee meetings once a week or once every two weeks. I forget. I believe, it was once a week. He'd have lunch in the secretary's office. I remember we always had steak and some trout, and I was an exofficio member beginning in 1967 when I won

the race for the Secretary to the Democratic Conference.

So from '67 on through Mr. Mansfield's tenure I sat as a member of the leadership in the Policy Committee luncheons. Mr. Mansfield usually had a paper already with an idea typed out on it. And he would read it, and it would be discussed at the luncheon; and usually the approval of the group was there. And Mr. Mansfield would then indicate to the press the decisions that had been made at the Policy Committee meeting. So he used the Policy Committee mostly for decision-making.

BAKER: Did you have a sense that some of the decisions were made before the meeting began?

BYRD: In some instances I think it was pretty clear as to what Mansfield's feelings were. But he ran it around the table and got the opinion of senators. And it was a good cross-section of senators--men like Senator Symington, Senator Fulbright, Senator Eastland, Senator Russell, Senator Pastore. And the whip at the time would be either Senator Russell Long or Senator Kennedy. I can't recall if there were others.

BAKER: If a senator anticipated a problem he might have with some of the policy issues that were going to be decided, would it have been more natural for a senator to speak to the

Leader before the meeting to try to work out those difficulties, or was the climate such that the senator could say, Look I just can't go along on this. I think we're headed in the wrong direction.

BYRD: I don't think we had much of that in that Policy Committee meeting. It was usually pretty supportive. They didn't get into the civil rights issues much because that was moving offstage so they didn't have that opportunity for a schism.

BAKER: The war in Vietnam.

BYRD: The war in Vietnam took the place.

BAKER: Let's go back a minute to the democratic conference. It's been said that Lyndon Johnson didn't want to have meetings of the conference because it would promote spontaneous challenges to his leadership. Is there a feeling that was also true during the years of Mike Mansfield's leadership?

BYRD: No, I don't think so. I'm not sure that that was accurate with respect to Johnson. I wouldn't have my doubts, however. But he operated in an environment in which he didn't encourage opposition. And he didn't necessarily open the doors for opportunity. So he didn't have conferences, and I think

operating in his situation he probably did the right thing. I mean, he had the support of people he needed; and he worked very well with Senator Dirksen and his counterparts on the other side of the aisle. He didn't have too adversarial a relationship with the Republican president, Eisenhower. He had everything going for him and in the same direction, so I guess he didn't consider it necessary to waste time on conferences.

Mr. Mansfield had more of them. Mr. Mansfield was not as controversial a figure as Mr. Johnson was and not as likely to ignite feelings in conferences. Things pretty well went along as Mr. Mansfield wanted them in conferences. Oftentime the conferences would dwindle away to a shirttail full of people and make a decision after there were only ten or fifteen left. But members didn't see fit, or didn't have any cause, to joust with Mr. Mansfield. Challenge him. And he managed to stay above the dust and smoke of the fray.

I was the whip for much of the time when I was out on the floor putting together the time agreements and battling the parliamentary duels with Senator Jim Allen and republicans. So, as a consequence, I was more the lightning rod than Mr. Mansfield.

BAKER: Did the major issues that would have sparked difficulty, contentiousness, in those two forums basically be matters of scheduling? Is that, really, what the particular power

responsibility was particularly in the policy committee?

BYRD: In those days senators didn't grouse about the schedule so much.

BAKER: I was thinking particularly about the scheduling of legislation. Having certain bills just stay off the track for the time being for whatever reason.

BYRD: Well, the Policy Committee--back in those days, especially in Johnson's day--the Policy Committee and Johnson. They determined what bills would be taken up. In Mr. Mansfield's time he still would counsel with the Policy Committee and his own floor staff and with the committee chairmen to make those decisions. And, I believe we were in session probably a little more during the year back then than we have been in later years.

I can remember when there was no August recess. I believe I'm right on that. I don't believe we went all out for the August recess until Senators like McGee and I came here. See, I go back to the House. We got out early. I can remember when we adjourned sine die on August 2 one year, I believe, and July the 29th or some such one year. So we didn't have as long sessions early on. Then the Civil Rights issue came to the front, and the sessions began to get longer and longer and longer. So I better

not try to attempt to recall the length of sessions now because I might be inaccurate.

BAKER: If we could, I'd like to shift attention to the floor and, again, focusing on your early time in the Senate--particularly the first two years, it must have been a daunting task. All of a sudden you're a United States senator. You had experience in the House, but you have to walk out on that floor and operate in a league with Richard Russell and other senior senators.

How did you go about learning to be a senator in terms of floor operations?

BYRD: Just watching and listening. Watching them. And it wasn't entirely foreign to me. I had been a member of the House while things are much different in the senate--easier, and slower, more casual, polite. Just watched and studied other senators. So that didn't turn out to be a problem. And then I was concentrating on West Virginia--getting what I could.

I didn't get involved in floor debate very much. I wasn't a chairman of committee or very ranking member of any committee. I wasn't caught up in the international issues. I was a parochial senator--very interested in West Virginia, working in my committees to get something for West Virginia.

BAKER: We all tend to read history backwards. And people today think of Senator Robert Byrd as a master of the Senate rules and precedents and would want to think, maybe you started in 1959 and realized the importance of that. You're suggesting that that's not something you did right off.

BYRD: No. No, I didn't show a great interest in that until I ran for the Secretary of the Democratic Conference. And was elected. Then I began to stay on the floor practically all the time, and I became interested in the rules and precedents and made them my study. And as time went on, I developed the use of them. As secretary of the Democratic Conference, I did most of Mr. Mansfield's floor work. As the whip I did most of his floor work, and I had plenty of healthy exercise added at the job because Senator Allen came here to the Senate about 19 and 69, I believe. I was secretary of the Democratic Conference at that time, and then I became the whip in '71. And Senator Allen was here, I think, around '78 or '79 for about ten years and was a master of the rules when he came here.

He told me that, as lieutenant governor of Alabama, he presided over the Alabama senate; and I believe he, I recall, used much the same rules as the United States Senate rules. So he was well grounded in them and very bright. So he gave me a lot of

good working overs and working outs, and it sharpened my ability to use the rules

BAKER: The two of you sort of developed a friendly adversarial relationship?

BYRD: Yes. Yes we did. I liked him very much personally; and he often told me, he liked me. We just had a little different niche carved out for each of ourselves.

BAKER: It was sort of an intellectual challenge of doing battle?

BYRD: Yes. Yes. Yes, there was an intellectual challenge of doing battle. I had some advantages. One of the advantages I had was I was in the leadership; and when I stood in for Mr. Mansfield as the assistant leader, I got recognition ahead of Mr. Allen--although in those days Mr. Mansfield allowed the republicans to preside for about four hours every day.

BAKER: Was that a departure from the Johnson years?

BYRD: Yes. Yes, it was.

BAKER: Why did Senator Mansfield allow this?

BYRD: I don't know. He was just the kind of nice gentlemanly person who didn't see politics as being so far removed from civility that he shouldn't act toward the republicans as he would toward other people that were gentlemen. And he was well liked. But, of course, he was the leader; and I didn't tell him what to do. So I lived with it.

But there were times when the Republicans were in the chair, and they were somewhat, through a particular issue on the floor at the time, would be aligned with Senator Allen. But he and I had a good relationship. Allen and I. I had a great respect for him. He was a gentleman in every sense of the word.

BAKER: You mentioned that in the early years you spent your time as a junior senator at your committee work. And very quickly you became the chairman of a controversial subcommittee, the District of Columbia Committee on Appropriations.

BYRD: Yes.

BAKER: How did you happen to take over that position?

BYRD: Well, it just fell into my lap. Senator Pastore was chairman of that Appropriations subcommittee when I first went

on the full committee. But I had been in the full committee two years, I believe; and I was put on the DC subcommittee along with some other subcommittees at the beginning. And in two years, I believe, he became chairman of another subcommittee; and that subcommittee chairmanship became open, and I took it. It wasn't something I wanted, but I've always believed strongly in living up to the scriptural passage, "Whatsoever thy hand finest to do, do it with thy might." So I did it with my "might." I worked at it just as though it was the best subcommittee on the committee.

BAKER: I read a quotation by Senator Muskie who was presiding one day when you presented in September, 1961, your first appropriations bill for \$270 million. And he said that it was a masterful presentation--that he had seen similar presentations and you knew where all that money was going.

BYRD: Well, I knew down to the first decimal every appropriations figure in that bill. I didn't have to have a clerk or anybody. I knew if it was \$1,787,461 and twenty-nine cents. I knew it. I had a good memory, and figures appealed to me. I was good in high school. Math. Geometry. I always liked figures, math in those days. It was easy for me. It was no problem for me to just have those figures at my fingertips. So I was able to present the whole budget without any notes at all. And I had more time to get to it then. And there is no point in mastering it to

that degree if one can write it out and read it and have it mean the same thing. It goes in the Congressional Record. The same thing. It's just that I had the time then, and I thought I would demonstrate that I was master of that budget. And I did.

BAKER: But the end result--those were the conclusions you had to arrive at after a lot of investigation.

BYRD: Oh, Yes. Oh, I gave it my time. We had hearings, and I worked hard at it. I remember that Senator Stennis gave me some advice when I took over that committee. He said, Well, you'll make a big job out of that, young man. He said, That's a small job; but you'll make a big job out of it. And he had occasion to make that same comment to me a few years later when I became the secretary of the Democratic Conference. He said, Well, that's a job that a lot of people don't think it very significant. But you'll make it an important job, Robert. Robert. He called me "Robert." You'll make it an important job. I've seen ya. And many times he has scribbled me a note, and I've got those notes in my scrapbook or hanging on my office wall. Senator Stennis always took the time to give me a note of encouragement. So he was one of my favorite, all-time senators. He was a senator who for a long time I would not address by his first name. He was a model of decorum and circumspection. He looked upon Senator Russell about like I did. He always was

deferential to Senator Russell. That told me a lot.

BAKER: If you had to name two or three members of the Senate that you looked to with that kind of respect, who would you include?

BYRD: Senator Russell, Senator Stennis. That was about it. About it.

BAKER: I've noticed in reading about your chairmanship of the DC Appropriations Subcommittee that, very early, you broke tradition--that the pattern up until your chairmanship had been very generous to the District. And the House would come along and knock a lot of that out. You apparently took a different approach.

BYRD: Well, I learned when I was on the subcommittee that there were a lot of people in the District of Columbia who were drawing welfare checks who didn't qualify. So when I became chairman I decided to take those people off the roles. And it was not a popular thing to do. But I didn't make the regulations, and I did have a responsibility of chairing that subcommittee and trying to be as knowledgeable and as wise in the appropriation of the taxpayer's money to the District of Columbia as to anywhere else. And I felt that those people were taking money that ought

to go to other causes in the District. So I subjected myself to a great deal of obliquy opprobrium, and calumny, and scorn. The Washington Post editorialized against me a great deal.

But I tried to do the right thing. For those welfare recipients who qualified, I saw to it that they got more money. At one point I put into effect, I believe it was a 13 percent increase in welfare payments. To the ones who were eligible and qualified, I increased their welfare payments. I increased the number of social workers. I upgraded the social workers so they could earn more money in welfare. I did a lot for the welfare department. But I was not for welfare cheaters. I'm not for them today--whether they were white or whether they were black.

But being chairman of that subcommittee a lot of people looked upon me as somebody who was against blacks simply because the black population exceeded the white population. And there were more blacks on the welfare roles here. That's not necessarily true throughout the country. But here was the jurisdiction which my subcommittee operated. So I had to work with what I found here. I also took those savings and put them into schools in the District of Columbia. Recreation facilities. I guess I was responsible for one of the first--if not the first--outdoor swimming pool or some of the recreational facilities. I also beefed up the police department. Gave them more money for police. Went with the police out at nights on

occasion.

BAKER: It must have been a surprise to the police to have the chairman of the subcommittee riding around.

BYRD: Yes. The only criticism that anybody could muster against me was that I was down on welfare cheaters, and they managed to emphasize that rather than be objective and look at the overall picture and things I was doing for the District and Department of Education, Police, and Recreation, other health services and what I was doing even within the Welfare Department to bring it respect and to improve the lot of those people who qualified--and the workers. But I was chairman of that subcommittee seven years.

BAKER: Longer than you had to be.

BYRD: No. No. That was the first time that another opportunity came to me. That after seven years I was glad to move out. But when I moved out, the welfare case load which had been going down, down, down, down started going up, up, up, up.

BAKER: You must have had some constraints on you as chairman of that subcommittee. First of all, you had had some relationship with the chairman of the District of Columbia

authorizing, Senator Alan Bible.

BYRD: Well, as I recall, Senator Bible supported me in my efforts to clean up the welfare situation. No, I think he was very supportive, as I recall.

BAKER: Was that the general nature of your relationship with him? He and you had the chairmanship during that whole seven years.

BYRD: Well, I always had a good relationship with Senator Bible. And the Senate in general supported my efforts-- republicans and democrats generally. I remember Senator Mansfield voted with me and some of the tough votes. There were efforts made on the Senate floor to put money back into certain welfare case loads. I don't recall exactly how the issues came up, but I remember time after time after time the Republican leadership and Senator Mansfield and the southern senators and a good many of the northern senators and all supported me up there in these efforts. And, as I say, they were not popular.

BAKER: And it was also said--as I said you had broken tradition--that you also seemed to be able to prevail on the House side--that you didn't promise anything that you couldn't get through on the House side.

BYRD: Yes, I always had the support--I mean I worked well, let's put it that way, with Mr. Natcher. I believe he was the chairman of that subcommittee over there at that time, and we worked together well and got along very well with him.

BAKER: How did that work? Did you go over, or did he come over and sit down with you, did you with him, did your staffs get together?

BYRD: We did all those things. Uhmmmm.

BAKER: Well, it raises the question about staff. What kinds of staff resources did you have available as chairman of the subcommittee?

BYRD: Probably one staff person. Probably one of the Appropriations Committee staff, and that person probably would have available someone who could type, put figures together. Not a lot of staff.

BAKER: You were essentially "it." If you decided you wanted to move into a new area of investigation...

BYRD: Well, I had a good staff person. Harold Merrick

was the committee staff person at that time. These were professional staff people. They're good at their work.

BAKER: Perhaps briefly we could turn to another major committee that you moved on to, the Armed Services Committee. You served on that committee from 1963 to 1968 at a time when the Vietnam war was beginning to heat up.

BYRD: Yes.

BAKER: Tell me a little bit about your service.

BYRD: I believe I went on there before 1963. It seems to me that I did because I think Lyndon Johnson went off that when he became Vice President. He went off, and I went on that committee. So he would have gone off in 1961.

BAKER: Okay.

BYRD: If he didn't go off in the Fall of 1960. He might have gone off then. Senator Russell was chairman.

I never did like the Armed Services Committee as much as I liked Appropriations because I saw more opportunities to help my state in Appropriations. My state has no seacoast, so there is no

way I could get a naval base, large air base, Army base. They were pretty much given out by that time. Spread around. About all I could do was get armories and things like that.

And I just didn't have the interest somehow in getting my teeth into the Armed Services Committee work.

BAKER: But you sat through committee meetings?

BYRD: Yes. Yes, I attended a lot of committee meetings and took a very interested part in the 1963 treaty with the Soviets. The Test Ban Treaty. I believe it was 1963. I voted against that treaty based on what I sat and listened to in the hearings. I remember Dr. Teller came before the Committee. He was very opposed to that treaty, and I was influenced by his testimony. I believe Senator Russell voted against that. I'm not sure.

BAKER: I was going to ask you about Senator Russell as chairman. You sat there and had a chance to observe him at pretty close range.

BYRD: Yes.

BAKER: Anything in particular that you recall that was his

style of running the committee?

BYRD: Well, he seemed to be someone who was in charge of the Committee. The members trusted his judgment--just like most members, myself particularly included, put a great deal of trust in Sam Nunn's judgment as Chairman of that Armed Services Committee today. Why did we do that? Because we saw Senator Russell and we see Senator Nunn as somebody who doesn't appear to have any particular ax to grind. They're there to do what's best for the country.

You can't always pinpoint where they come from. There are some senators you can always pinpoint just where they'll come from on an issue. Just where they're going to be. Well, these two men instead of having closed minds on issues had open minds. And that's what these other people feel--that they are men of judgment. Open minds. Not opinionated to the point that they could only see one side.

And the military establishment, of course, gave him the same respect that we on the committee gave him and in the Senate. And Senator Russell had strong support on the Republican side of the aisle, too.

BAKER: Well, Senator, as time is going here and perhaps by way of wrapping up, you have a list of the members of the 86th

Congress before you. I was wondering if you might take a look at some of those names in seniority order; and with the whole thought of this nebular term of "legislative effectiveness," if you had any comments you might want to make on the names that you see there.

BYRD: Well, it was a pretty impressive group. Carl Hayden had been here for many years. Had been chairman of that Appropriations Committee for a long, long time. Solid, conservative type. Senator Russell, we've already talked about him. Senator Harry Flood Byrd was Chairman of the Finance Committee. A very conservative senator. Pretty solid in his economics.

BAKER: Could we pause and focus on him as a committee chairman also. His style of operation.

BYRD: I didn't know much about his style of operation. I was not on his committee, and I know that he was held in great respect here among my colleagues when I came here.

Senator Styles Bridges, a Republican. I was very impressed with him. There was something about him. He didn't seem to be too partisan. He seemed to be, again, a conservative-type senator. Most of these senators that I am naming were

conservatives. I liked him.

Senator Ellender was a very hard worker on Appropriations. Senator Lister Hill was a man I liked a great deal. He was a very learned man. I listened to his speeches. He was a lot like Senator Russell. He was conservative, but he was an open-minded, reasonable man who listened to both sides. Well liked.

George Aiken. Of course, he was a man that everybody liked on both sides of the aisle. So there were a lot of other good senators.

John Stennis, we've talked about him. And Lyndon Johnson was way down the list in seniority from some of those we have talked about. Margaret Chase Smith. Very highly respected. And she was on the Armed Services Committee also. I also liked her. John Pastore was a man that I always liked to feel out his judgment on things, too. He was very, very bright. Articulate and a lot of good political acumen and common sense about him.

Everett Dirksen, of course. He was one of a kind. O'Mahoney of Wyoming. I looked upon him as a good legal mind and not a kind of "way out." I think he was very solid. And Alan Bible. Sam Ervin was looked upon as a constitutional scholar. So I had the enviable opportunity to come here when there were a lot of outstanding members of the body.

There were some bright stars in my class, too. Gale McGee and Ed Muskie, Phil Hart, and others.

BAKER: Did you have a sense of class togetherness. Class unity. You all came at the same time.

BYRD: Yes. Yes, I did have a sense of that. Howard Cannon. Of course, Senator Dodd and I had served together in the House before we came here. I'd served in the House with Ken Keating, Eugene McCarthy. I believe McCarthy was in the House. I believe Prouty was in the House. Hugh Scott was. Harrison Williams was. Bartlett was a delegate over there.

BAKER: Senator, I thank you for your time. I think next time when we sit down we might focus upon your leadership roles in the Senate starting with the Secretary to the Democratic Caucus and then whip to the Democrats.

BYRD: All right.

Senator Robert C. Byrd

Interview #3

December 21, 1989

Interview Number Three

December 21, 1989

BAKER: This is our third interview on December 21, 1989. Senator, I'd like to begin by asking you about your first major leadership in the Senate--the position of Secretary of the Democratic Conference which you assumed in 1967.

Could you tell me a little bit about your thinking that led you to decide to seek that position?

BYRD: I'd never had any thoughts of running for a leadership position until I noticed in the newspapers one day here that George Smathers, who was at that time the secretary of the Democratic Conference, had decided not to run again. I don't recall whether the story was he wouldn't run again for secretary of the Democratic Conference or whether he was not going to run

again for Senate.

In any event, he was not going to run again for the secretary of the Democratic Conference. So that was the first time the thought struck me. I thought, well I might have a chance--a good chance--to win that 'cause the Southerners all liked me. And I got along very well with some of the others, too. But the fact that I had been a staunch opponent of cloture pretty much threw that whole Southern bloc right into my camp.

So I announced. I went to see Senator Russell, of course, first--first of all. And from there I'm sure I went to see Senator Hayden, Senator Stennis. And I would have gone to see Senator Mansfield, of course, he being the Leader at that time.

There were two others who filed in that race--Joe Clark of Pennsylvania and Fred Harris of Oklahoma. As it turned out, I won the race.

BAKER: Were you the first to announce for that race?

BYRD: I don't recall that.

BAKER: The press accounts indicate that the real race was between you and Senator Clark of Pennsylvania and indicated that he seemed to have an edge if only for reasons of geography--that

he would be perceived as an easterner coming from Pennsylvania to balance the whip, Senator Long from the South, and Senator Mansfield from the West. Was that a problem for you in the race--trying to be perceived as an easterner?

BYRD: No. It wasn't a problem for me. I'm sure that if that appealed to any votes it would have been extremely few because not many votes in these inside issue races are cast on the basis of geography. Obviously, if two come from the same region--let's say the South--and one is outside the South, that might make a marginal difference. But in this race with Joe Clark coming from the East and West Virginia being a kind of a middle Atlantic, belonging to the South and the North and the East, that wouldn't have cut much ice.

BAKER: So we set geography aside. What about ideology as opposed to just basic personality. Was this a race that was decided on personalities?

BYRD: No, I don't think it would have been settled on personalities. Few people around here ever gave me an A+ for personality. But ideology probably played more in that race than in any race after that that I was in.

That was fresh after my filibuster against the 1964 Civil

Rights Act; my vote against the Test Ban Treaty, 1963; and my vote against the Voting Rights Act in 1965. My being an opponent--a solid opponent--against cloture would automatically give me the Southern votes. And with that Southern bloc and the way being a three-way split, I was not at any disadvantage. I was able to pick off some border states as well. Bob Kerr. He was still living at that time, wasn't he?

BAKER: No.

BYRD: Wasn't he?

BAKER: No. He died in 1963.

BYRD: Who were some of the other border-state senators at that time? Well, there were states like Nevada with Alan Bible. These states generally work well with the Southerners and with Dick Russell. And so Russell's influence there--Senator Russell's influence, Senator Russell Long, and other Southerners--I'm sure that they dropped some words here and there that helped me with senators outside the South, so I could pick up some Westerners. Well there was Carl Hayden from Arizona. He's not a southerner but. Was Chavez still living then?

BAKER: Yes. Yes, he was.

BYRD: Well, if he was still living, I would have gotten that one because a vote like that would have gone where Dick Russell and the Southern vote went. So having the Southern support in that race meant having support outside the South.

BAKER: It extended over into the West?

BYRD: Yes.

BAKER: And by that time, Senator Clark may have made a few enemies in the Senate.

BYRD: Ideology there again, I think, played a big part. That would have welded to him certain support that I couldn't get; and it would have, perhaps, had something to do with driving off certain support which I picked up. I don't remember how much support Fred Harris had or where it went after he dropped out.

BAKER: Was it done low man out, or did he drop out?

BYRD: I don't remember. I just don't recall. That's a good question. Just in the back of my memory it seemed that he dropped out of the race. Seems that he did, but I can't remember now. I must go back and refresh my memory on that.

BAKER: At the time you took the job over, it was--in Senator Smathers' view--a minor job, a job that wasn't worth a whole lot. He suggested that he gave it up because of lack of interest in it. That seems to have changed pretty quickly under your stewardship.

BYRD: I recall Senator Stennis saying to me that you'll make something out of this job. He'd seen me become the chairman of the District of Columbia Appropriations Subcommittee, and I'd made something out of that subcommittee assignment. I worked hard at it and gotten a good bit of publicity in regard to my work. So he was one who encouraged me to try to make something out of the secretary of the Democratic Conference.

About a week after I had won that race--a week or ten days--I came on the floor, and George Smathers was there. He said, Well what are you doing back in your office? You won this job. You're supposed to stay here. I guess he was kidding me. But that did something to me. It went like a bunch of bells or lights off--a bunch of bells. It rang some bells. I ought to be here on the floor. If I'm going to make something out of this job, I ought to be here. So from then on, I was there.

BAKER: As you walked onto the floor at the beginning of

that, and looked around and, first of all, saw the Majority Leader, the Whip. And Senator Mansfield had set up a system several years earlier of assistant whips.

BYRD: I don't think so. Oh, I believe maybe he had; but nobody did any work that I could recall.

BAKER: I'd read that those assistant whips--Senators Hart, Muskie, Inouye, Brewster--all pretty much disappeared shortly after you took over.

BYRD: I don't remember. I remember he had some assistant whips. I don't remember what happened. Anyhow, I just glued myself to the floor.

BAKER: Senator Long had become chairman of the Finance Committee a short time before. I guess it was 1965. This was in 1967. How did you divide up floor responsibilities with Senator Long?

BYRD: Well, he was busy in his committee; and I stayed on the floor. And I was Russell Long's friend. He knew he didn't have to worry about any challenge from me. Matter of fact, I told him so. You see me around the floor all the time. I don't want you to think that I'm thinking about running for your job. If

there's ever a time that you don't want your job, or you move on up, then I'd be interested. But I'm not going to run against you. Or against Mansfield. And he knew I meant that. I'm sure he didn't have any concerns about me in that light.

BAKER: Well, how did you know what to do in a job like that. Your concerns and your experience had been committee work.

BYRD: Well, I didn't know what to do. I just sat there. However, I went to Mansfield and said, if there is anything I can do here, I want to help. I want you to know I'm here to help. I'll watch the floor while you're busy at other things. You tell me what you want done, what you want not done. I'll see to it.

Well, he began to have that kind of confidence in me; and it wasn't the kind of work he particularly liked, I don't think. And he was glad to have somebody there helping to mind the store. And, as I did that, I got the book of precedents and the book of rules and began to study them so that I began to know some things about the floor work.

BAKER: How did you do that? Those are formidable. The book of rules is a very brief book, the book of precedents is a very large book.

BYRD: Yes, the book on Senate Procedure contains all the precedents. It's a very large book; and in many areas, it is complicated. And dry throughout. But in high school I liked mathematics, so it had an aspect that was a bit like mathematics. It made you think.

BAKER: It's not organized in a logical way. It's organized like a dictionary. On a number of occasions I've seen junior senators on the floor in tough parliamentary situations sort of flailing away, not quite knowing what to do in looking at that book.

BYRD: A lot of them aren't junior senators who don't know what to do. It's been amazing to me over the years how little, how really very little, senators do absorb with respect to the rules and precedents.

BAKER: This makes this a particularly important question. How would you advise senators to do that?

BYRD: Well, I would advise them to learn more about the rules and precedents. It's not something that's particularly fascinating reading, but it's important. And to a person who has a pretty good knowledge of the rules and precedents, it's always

amazing, sometimes embarrassing, to see other senators who, to the initiated--perhaps not to the uninitiated--reveal their utter ignorance of the rules. After having been around here for years.

It's my feeling that, whether or not I had ever aspired to any position in the leadership, I would have wanted at least to acquire more than a passing knowledge of the rules. Because he who is a senator ought to look like a senator, act like a senator, and talk like a senator.

But senators will remain around here for years, and they will never learn the difference between the morning hour and morning business. I often hear of senators refer to the morning hour when they're obviously referring to morning business, and they don't know what morning business is even. Senators will stay here for years, and they think that morning business is a period in which senators are supposed to make short speeches. Whereas, as a matter of fact, senators are not supposed to speak in morning business.

Morning business is for the purpose of introducing bills, and reports, and resolutions, and petitions, and memorials. But it's not for speeches. It's only through the unanimous consent orders that the Leader gets permitting senators to speak in morning business. And that has become a portion of the day that has been set aside for short speeches. But permission has to be gotten to

speak in morning business. That is, if the Chair is on his toes and knows what the rules are himself, it's too bad. So many times if it weren't for the parliamentarians guiding the Chair, there are very few senators who would know how to keep the Senate moving in an orderly fashion from the Chair. Very few in the time I've been here. Let's put it that way. Very few relatively speaking.

BAKER: It strikes me that even the parliamentarians recommended ruling to the Chair often can be interpreted a number of ways based on the legislative situation.

BYRD: Let me put it this way, sometimes new assistants to the parliamentarians go up there. They have to have some exposure. They have to exercise some apprenticeship. And when they are in a period of apprenticeship, I often find that they're not advising the Chair discriminatingly and quite careful enough.

For example, if a senator offers a resolution and asked for its immediate consideration, the parliamentarian should not let the Chair say "without objection" before the Chair says "The Clerk will state the title of the resolution;" because the Chair is supposed to let the Senate know what the resolution was about before the Chair asks the Senate whether or not it will give consent. For the Senate to give its consent before the Clerk has stated the title of the resolution is getting the cart before the

horse. Because once the Senate learns what the resolution is about, if it has already given its consent, it might be sorry that it did so.

The system that we have in which we do not have a permanent presiding officer--we have senators coming and going all day into and out of the chair--it puts a burden, a greater burden, on the parliamentarian. Because he has to sit there and advise the freshman in the chair.

All too often members who have been here quite awhile and haven't learned much about the rules; but because they do have seniority, they think they know how to preside. And when they're sitting in the chair, they'll just--when I can see that there were some things that they missed on the way up in growing up there were some things they missed.

For example, there will be senators occasionally who will get in the chair; and they'll speak from the chair. If the senator in the chair is complimented by a senator from the floor, the senator in the chair is not supposed to respond to that.

And if there are visitors from other countries who come to the chamber and are introduced, the Chair is not supposed to say something to those visitors to make them feel welcome. That's not the Chair's place. And all too often members who have been here long enough to know better will be in the chair, and they will

take it upon themselves to relieve themselves of some remarks of wisdom. It's really not a very good impression that's left.

The Chair is supposed to say as little as possible. He has to, to certain rulings. He has to respond to parliamentary inquiries. He has to make certain announcements. But he is not supposed to respond even to criticism. Of course, it might get to a point where he would feel, for the sake of the record, he had to say something.

So what I'm saying is that senators quite often reveal the fact that this institution is not there pond to water after all. All too often senators address other senators in the second person. They're not supposed to do that. They're supposed to address other senators through the Chair: "Mr. President, will the Senator from West Virginia yield?" They're supposed to address senators through the Chair and always in the third person.

Well, we all slip sometimes; and we don't always--none of us, no senator--always addresses another senator through the Chair. I don't always. Lyndon Johnson didn't always. Of course, he was not a stickler for the rules. He would often, "Will the senator yield? Will the senator yield?" Break right into the middle of a senator's sentence--"Will the senator yield?" Instead of saying, "Mr. President, will the senator yield?" But the correct way is to address another senator through the Chair.

The more unforgivable part of that equation is in the use of second person in addressing another senator. "You did thus and so." "You don't have this," or "You're wrong." That betrays the senator who is speaking as one who is really not schooled in the ways of the Senate. And there is a reason for addressing senators in the third person. It keeps down acerbatives by keeping personalities out of the debate. One doesn't appear to be, and one doesn't become, so personal if he talks of another senator in the third person as he does if he's speaking to the senator directly using a second person. It's much like pointing the finger at someone.

From time to time in the chair I call the attention of senators to that. But it happens so often that the Chair feels a little hesitant to be appearing to interfere so much by calling it to the attention of senators. And very seldom do I hear other senators in the chair ever call it to his attention--possibly only when the parliamentarian reminds them that they should do it.

Another thing that the Chair should do, the Chair has the responsibility of whether a point of order is made from the floor or not. To maintain order in the Senate and in the galleries. And most senators wait for another senator to call and ask for order. That's not right. It is the duty of the senator; the duty of the Chair to secure and maintain order in the galleries--and on the floor without a point of order being made from the floor.

BAKER: Is that situation more extreme now than, say, when you became conference secretary?

BYRD: Yes. I don't think senators are as aware of these nuances as they were in the old days.

BAKER: Why do you think that is?

BYRD: Well, they're not here. They don't stay here as long. They're too busy doing other things. Their attention is elsewhere all too much of the time. Part of the time it's on fund-raising--the necessity for getting out and around the city and around the country to raise funds for the next campaign keeps senators tied down. Keeps them from doing their work on the floor, in committees; takes them away from their families. So they don't spend as much time being a senator as they used to spend to when I first came here.

BAKER: There seems to be two images of a senator today. One is the frantic pace of being overscheduled and trying to be at three committee hearings at the same time. In a body that seems to traditionally put great value on deliberation, I hear you saying, to be effective on the floor do take the time.

BYRD: Well, that image is correct. The workload has increased and will increase. Population is constantly increasing. New problems arise. New issues. There's a new one everyday. They come up, oh so many times unexpectedly, just like the invasion of Panama. Who would have thought the evening before that that was about to happen?

So senators have too many committees. I'm on two major committees and one lesser committee. But I could spend all of my time on one committee. And that's the way it ought to be. But senators are greedy when it comes to committees. The more committees one is on, he feels that's better for the folks back home. They see his name on the letterhead, on the stationery. He's on this committee and that committee, and another committee, another committee--this select committee, that class B committee, that Class A committee, that Class A committee. And on all these committees. It has the aura of power.

So, politically, it's attractive. But when it comes to making the meetings, one senator can't be in two places at once.

BAKER: It's interesting to compare the percentage of the majority party senators who are chair of some subcommittee or full committee today as opposed to twenty or thirty years ago.

BYRD: Well, back then they were chairmen of more

subcommittees than they are now. In 1946 the Legislative Reorganization Act made a big difference in that regard. Then back in 1970 when the Stevenson Committee did its work and cut back. So, from that standpoint, senators aren't probably on as many subcommittees, generally speaking, as they were then.

But back then they didn't have to spend all their time raising fund for the next campaign. Today, a senator can't be a full-time senator. He has to be a part-time legislator and a full-time fund-raiser if he hopes to continue in public service here. One doesn't really understand how much time a senator is taken away from his duties here by the necessities of the next campaign.

As majority leader, I saw it every day with senators in the Senate. As minority leader, I saw it. Senators were always reminding me of their need to be here, or there, or somewhere else on this day, that day, and the other day in the interest of raising funds for their own campaigns and for their colleagues. Many times six or eight senators will go up to New York together, or out to California, in the interest of raising monies for their colleagues. And that time is taken away from their work, their duties here.

And it impacts on the rest of the Senate; because when six or eight senators are away raising funds for campaigns, that majority

leader up there finds it hard to schedule certain legislation because those senators won't be here to offer amendments. They won't be here to vote. It creates cross-currents of problems that the average person is not aware of. As a matter of fact, the average senator is not nearly aware of it as the Leader is because he has to deal with the problems of the whole Senate.

BAKER: That was one of your responsibilities as conference secretary in 1967--to begin to have a sense of where senators were going to be at any particular time.

BYRD: Yes, it was. But, as I have indicated, it wasn't near the problem then as it is now--as it has become in later years.

BAKER: It must be a rather daunting organizational task, though, just to keep track of where senators are. Speaking for the majority party, you're really speaking for the whole Senate in knowing where people are.

BYRD: Well, we have help in knowing where they are.

BAKER: But in controlling the flow of business on the floor, doesn't that all come down to one person?

BYRD: Well, it comes down to the person. He has to put it into his mental computer and his plans. But he is helped in knowing where they are by the cloakrooms and people's staffs.

BAKER: But I was thinking more of not so much their physical locations but promises and agreements that are made that a vote won't be scheduled or a live pair won't be needed.

BYRD: Yes. Well, not many of them ask for live pairs. But the requests for holding votes are multitudinous.

BAKER: Has that increased?

BYRD: Yes. Oh, yes. Again, it gets back to this business of campaign necessities. Any more, they're such that senators can't do their work--and do it as they should do. They can't spend their time here. They have to be always thinking of the next campaign. And the average winning Senate seat last year, I think, was around \$4 million. Well, that means that a senator has to raise on the average about \$12,000 a week--52 weeks a year for six years--to manage to raise that kind of money.

BAKER: And that's on the average.

BYRD: That's the average. Many states that cost more, and some that cost less.

BAKER: I'd like to keep in the same period--in the late 1960's. In 1969 you dropped your membership on the Armed Services Committee and became a member of the Judiciary Committee. Why did you do that?

BYRD: Well, I had gotten my law degree at American University in 1963. At that time, I believe it was necessary--at least I was under the impression it was necessary--that one had to be a lawyer or to have a law degree to serve on the Judiciary Committee.

In any event, I felt that it was appropriate that one have a law degree to serve on that committee. So I asked to go on that committee. Besides, it's a further learning institution for the lawyer. A person who is just out of law school, as I was, it's a further college of law to serve on the Judiciary Committee.

I did very well at it. I was quite active on that committee. I remember the nomination for the FBI Director. His name was Mr. Gray, I believe.

BAKER: Patrick Gray.

BYRD: He came before the committee. I was very active in regard to that nomination and was somewhat instrumental in its--I believe it was withdrawn.

BAKER: And prior to that Richard Kleindienst as Attorney General in 1972.

BYRD: Yes. Yes. In later years I didn't give much attention to the Judiciary Committee because I was occupied on the floor all the time.

But I found the committee to be interesting--especially from a constitutional point of view. I wanted to go on that committee.

BAKER: At the same time you rose to the position of chairmanship of Rules Committee Subcommittee on Standing Rules. Now this is at a time when you are becoming more and more involved in floor operations. What was the reason for your moving to that position?

BYRD: Before that I think I was chairman of the Subcommittee on the Restaurants, and I was instrumental in having a kind of a buffet operation set up in the Senators' private dining room down here. So I blazed a trail or two on that subcommittee. (Laugh)

Well, on the Rules subcommittee I later recommended that not only that subcommittee but all other subcommittees on Rules be abolished so that one committee would have it all. And that was done. I believe it was done the day I made the recommendation. I'm not sure.

BAKER: That was the end of your service as chairman of the subcommittee.

BYRD: Yes, sir, I recommended that it be abolished. I think it was a good thing. Let the Rules Committee--Senate Rules and Administration Committee--have the myriad problems all under the jurisdiction under the committee rather than a number of subcommittees.

BAKER: The Committee on Rules and Administration sometimes seems to focus more on the administration side than it does on the rules side.

BYRD: Well, it does all the time. Yes, that occupies more of its attention--the administration side.

BAKER: But with regard to the rules side, what traditionally was that committee involved with at this particular time or later?

BYRD: Well, there were times when it conducted hearings into the cloture rule, the certain aspects of the rule the committee would get into. Also, when it came to radio and television coverage of the Senate, the Rules Committee went into that pretty thoroughly.

The Rules Committee dealt with the technical side of it, the practical problems associated with it--the lighting, the microphones. Also with the rule changes. This was done by resolution. The resolution was referred to the Committee on Rules. So where there are rules changes, the Rules Committee deals with those.

That's the one reason why I have not asked to go off that committee and on another committee, because it is an important committee from the standpoint of the rules. Any resolution regarding rules changes go to that committee.

BAKER: And, of course, farther down the road--another ten years down the road--in 1979 was a major recodification.

BYRD: Yes, that's true. It was the first in 95 years. So, the Rules Committee in the Senate is an important committee. It doesn't have the same perogatives and powers that the Rules Committee in the House has, because the Senate's a different

institution in so many ways. But it's an important committee. I count it as an important committee because I know the significance of rules around the Senate and the importance of not having many changes in the rules. So I like to stay on that committee as a kind of a watcher of the rules.

BAKER: From time to time is there a groundswell for significant changes to the rules?

BYRD: Oh, yes. There's always little minor whirlwinds that come up--senators wanting to change the rules. But it's usually the new senators who come in. Many of them come over from the House of Representatives or from a state legislature. They think the Senate here is an antiquated institution. It ought to move on--be like other bodies where you don't have to spend as much time and you can--get bills passed quickly and be off to the golf course, or fishing stream, or whatever.

These are laudable objectives, but that's one reason why I've wanted to leave something here by way of a history of the Senate so that senators will have an institutional memory and will understand that this Senate was never meant to operate like that.

There are always senators who feel the time ought to be cut down. All too often they feel that the quality of life--so-called quality of life--is the all-important thing in life. But they're

some of us here who have an institutional memory who happen to believe that the quality of work is what we're here for. The people sent us here to work. And when we run for office, we don't campaign before the people about the quality of life around here. We don't go back to the voters and emphasize that very much! We emphasize there the quality of work. But around here, some of the senators think more about the quality of life--all too much about that--and not enough about the quality of work and the fact that, to get our work done, it takes time.

I've found always that there are senators who are ready to criticize the scheduling of the work here and who always feel that the place could be more efficient and that we could get the work done in far less time. Well, the Senate wasn't meant to be an efficient institution. It was meant to be a deliberate body, and safeguards were instituted by the Founding Fathers to insure that it would be a deliberative body--that it would be a brake on the other body which would stand against the whims and passions that might sweep over the country.

But the rules, many of these rules, have their roots in the rules of the first Congress and going before that back into the Continental Congress. And before that some of them probably into the colonial legislatures. And there are vestigial roots that go back to the House of Commons. There is a lot of the British in us. And because rules are the products of time, and experience,

and trial. And they've stood the test of time. They weren't just something that dropped like the manna from heaven overnight, and we ought to proceed cautiously when we go about changing the rules.

Much like the Constitution, it shouldn't be too easy to change. And the rules shouldn't be too easy to change. And they're not easy to change.

BAKER: Senator, that brings us up to January the first, 1971, when you won the election as assistant leader of the Senate. And, on that same day, Richard Russell died. I've read several places that that day is as good as any day to mark the beginning of a new era in the Senate.

BYRD: Well, I had been working as secretary of the Democratic Conference for four years. Senator Long had been defeated by Senator Kennedy for the whip's job. And I had a much closer rapport and relationship with Senator Long at that time than I had had with Senator Kennedy. So I didn't have any compunctions against running for the whip's job against Senator Kennedy.

So I ran and won. I got Senator Russell's proxy. That was delivered to the caucus that day, and we had for several days anticipated that Senator Russell might not make it. So in the

event he was not able to attend the caucus, we had prepared to get his proxy. I had worked with Senator Talmadge in that regard, Senator Russell's colleague from Georgia. So Senator Talmadge arranged to have that proxy that day.

I wasn't cocksure of having a majority, but I was sure it was going to be awful close if I didn't have. And I was somewhat confident that I could win. That day I came to the office early--very early. I left the house about six o'clock; and on the way in I heard over the radio some news about Senator Russell, that he was alive and made it through the night. And I came on up to my office and made a few calls by way of last-minute efforts.

When I left the office to go to the conference, which was to be at ten o'clock, I believe, that morning, I was not absolutely sure when I left my office that I would run. When I left my home that morning, I told my wife, Erma, that I wasn't sure.

When I left that office that morning, I told my secretary that I wasn't sure. But by the time I got down to the end of the corridor from my office door, I believe I was in 105 at that time. It was a long corridor. By the time I got down to the end of the corridor, I made up my mind to run. And the thing that made up my mind was, the thought that ran through my mind: Here was a man at Walter Reed Hospital on his death bed. If he had the confidence in me and the faith in me to announce to the world

that he was for Robert C. Byrd and had written out in his failing handwriting a proxy for me, I ought to demonstrate the courage to run--to merit that kind of faith. And I thought, Well I'm gonna run. Win, lose, or draw. I'm just gonna do it. (Laugh)

So when I got to the conference and had short conversations with a couple or three other senators. And one whose vote I nailed down right there. I waited until the last minute to go after him. For good reasons. And I had prearranged a signal with Senator Randolph, my senior colleague from West Virginia, that if I had decided to run, I would give him a kinda of an indication--a nod or some such; and he would rise and put my name in nomination. Otherwise, he wouldn't. So I gave him the signal, and he put it in nomination.

I won that race. I won by seven votes. I won a lot of good many races, and votes, by the number seven. Following that, Senator Kennedy became one of my best, most solid, loyal supporters here. I could not have asked for one to be more strongly supportive than Senator Kennedy has been in my races since that time.

And he has been one of the better senators, in my view. As a matter of fact, I think it was probably good for him. He was able to give himself more to his committees, and he has done an excellent job as committee chairman and in committees over the

years. He probably has more legislation that can be attributed to his name here in the Senate than any other senator.

BAKER: Do you want to speculate a little bit on the reasons for his success?

BYRD: He does his homework. He has an excellent staff, and he knows his subject; and he puts his heart in it. He is passionately involved with the legislation that he pushes. He's a driving force. He has lots of energy. He's persuasive, eloquent in his speeches. He just goes all out on the issues that he interests himself in.

BAKER: Senator, this may be a good place to stop for today.

BYRD: Okay.

Senator Robert C. Byrd

Interview

Friday, April 12, 1990

BAKER: This is April 12, 1990; and we're talking with Senator Robert C. Byrd on the broad topic of reflections of a party leader.

Senator, in your earlier observations you described the leadership style of Lyndon Johnson as what some people have referred to as an energetic, persuasive style and of Mike Mansfield. Others have called it a quiet persistence approach. How would you characterize your own leadership style as majority leader? Or as party leader?

BYRD: It's difficult to see one's self as others see him. I think I probably was more in the Lyndon Johnson mold somewhere between Johnson and Mansfield. I was very energetic in

pushing the legislation. I did not hesitate to use the rules to move legislation forward, to get it up on the floor. Where I could do so by unanimous consent, I did it. And where I could not get the consent of the minority, I used the rules to do so.

I tried to reach consensus; and to do this, I met with my democratic colleagues. In small groups, I sounded them out on the politics of different approaches. There were certain senators like Paul Sarbanes, Wendell Ford, Scoop Jackson and others whose political judgment I trusted a great deal; and, consequently, I was able to develop a sense of where we should go and how we should get there. I depended upon my chairmen of committees to a great deal in determining what the Senate program should be, when we should schedule legislation, and what our legislative objectives ought to be in a given year or in a given congress.

I did not cajole or threaten senators, but I was persistent and did whatever I could by way of persuasion to develop unity within our party. My party majority was not as great as the party had enjoyed in some years. Through the long Reagan years when we were in the minority in the Senate, I developed a unity that served well when the democrats again assumed the majority in the 100th Congress. I was content with letting other senators have the front seat and the front row when it came to speaking out on the issues.

For example, I thought that Scoop Jackson was someone who could best present the energy matters and others, likewise, in relation to the other subject matter. I did not hesitate to speak out on the issues when I thought it was necessary and that I should do so. I think I was as aggressive in moving the legislation forward as was Johnson, but I did it perhaps in a different way.

Johnson was a highly energized person. So was I. He worked long hours, and so did I. He sometimes made the sparks fly, and so did I. I preferred cooperation over confrontation; but like Johnson, I did not shrink from confrontation.

Both Johnson and I were unlike Mansfield in this respect. Mansfield was very relaxed in dealing with the press. I never sought out the press. Let me put it this way, I felt that others were better on television than I was. I felt that there were other leadership responsibilities that I could do well and much better than that of making TV appearances, although I made a good many. I did it when I thought it was necessary. It was not my forte.

BAKER: In your 31 years of observing at very close hand, have you seen a split in the responsibilities of the floor leader, the majority leader, on one hand as a person who leads the Senate as an institution inside and on the other hand as the party

spokesman--or a major party spokesman--on the other side? Do you think there were greater demands, that there are demands today on the majority leader of the Senate that have grown only in recent times to be an outward looking, outside institution party spokesman?

BYRD: I think there is a greater emphasis on the need for the majority leader to be the party spokesman in the Senate when he is not of the same party that is in control of the White House. When Jimmy Carter was president, I was majority leader throughout his four years in the presidency. Serious responsibility on me to be the party spokesman was not all that great.

When I was minority leader, of course, I lacked the authority of a majority leader. I could not say that we will put this legislation before the Senate on such-and-such a date. I could not say, we will do this or will do that because I knew that I could not deliver unless I had the votes. And the minority doesn't have the votes. Consequently, I had much less to say publicly when I was minority leader than when I was majority leader. I accepted fewer invitations to be on television, and probably received fewer invitations to be on television, when I was minority leader. I simply felt that I was in no position to say what the minority could deliver, or would deliver, because we

didn't have the votes to deliver.

BAKER: In that situation--where the White House is controlled by a different party and you, as leader of the minority are in a position to speak for the minority--did that create any tensions when you looked over to the House side and the Speaker of the House is speaking for the Democratic Party. Also the party not in control of the White House. What is the nature of the dynamic between the leader of the Democrats in the Senate and the leader of the Democrats in the House of Representatives?

BYRD: The Speaker in the House, of course, had the majority party; and he was in a position to say what legislation would be scheduled, what legislation would not be scheduled, and what the majority would deliver. Whereas, being in the minority on the Senate side, I did not have the votes to deliver. I was in no position to schedule the legislation. Consequently, I did not feel that I should go around attempting to predict what would happen in the Senate. It made a great deal of difference.

During the Carter Administration, when the democrats controlled both houses, I held my own very well in competition with the House insofar as the House leadership as news was concerned. I had Saturday press conferences which were pretty popular and which drew a lot of attention.

But when the Republicans took over the Senate and Reagan took over the White House, I took over a minority party. Consequently, the spotlight shifted to the House where the democrats were in control.

BAKER: It shifted to the House of Representatives?

BYRD: To the House of Representatives.

BAKER: The Speaker of the House, by definition, was controlling democratic policy on the House side. Did you find that that put you at odds? After all, you were the spokesman for the democrats on the Senate side. If by definition there needs to be some degree of unity against an opposition administration.

BYRD: Well there was a certain degree of unity; but when one doesn't have the majority of the votes, as I didn't have, I could hardly be in a position to predict that we would deliver victories in the Senate or that we would pass such-and-such legislation. I never considered myself to be in a position to influence greatly the force of legislation in the Senate when I was minority leader.

My job, as I saw it, was to try to develop unity in the party--the unity which had become flacid through years of majority

rule in the Senate. I also felt that it was my responsibility as minority leader in the Senate to attempt to develop alternate proposals to legislation that was being promoted by the White House and the Republican leadership.

As I said many times to my colleagues in our conferences, let's go out and offer this amendment or that amendment because it's right. We won't win. But it's how it will look eighteen months from today, or twelve months from today, when we look back on it--not so much how we do today, not so much how it will look today, but how it will look a year from now when our position will have been proven right. That will be what will count. That is what will count.

So over those years in the minority, I think we developed positions that stood us in good stead as to went on. I must say that having a president of the other party in the White House is not the most enviable position for a majority or a minority leader to be in.

BAKER: Each brings a separate set of problems.

BYRD: Yes. But to have Ronald Reagan in the White House was far, far worse because he made it a daily assignment to kick the Congress around. Congress was his whipping boy. I felt that he didn't know much about the Federal government when he came

here, and he knew a little more when he left. I liked him personally. I thought he was a charming man. I didn't think he knew much about government, and I believe future historians will be of the opinion that he doggone nearly ruined this country.

BAKER: Did you have a sense that when you went down to the White House and had a message or position that you wanted get him to understand that he was receptive, that he wanted to listen, that he looked for partisan reasons to disagree?

BYRD: Well, he always listened. He was a charming person. I liked him personally. He was just difficult to deal with. He was very popular with the voters. Although I do not rate him as a first-class actor, he was certainly first class when it came to projecting his message on television. To a considerable extent, I think he had the American people fooled; and it was difficult for us democrats in the Senate. We couldn't get a message across, especially being in the minority. We didn't control the committees; consequently, we had no fora in which to project our view. We simply did the best we could.

But in the 100th Congress, we had developed the kind of unity when we became the majority that enabled us to confront Mr. Reagan. We were not timid about it. We overrode three of his vetoes right off. At the beginning of the 100th Congress we

overrode his veto-- the Clean Water bill, his veto of the Highway bill, and we later overrode his veto of the Grove City bill, the civil rights legislation. And we produced a record in that Congress in spite of his opposition. That was one of the best records. Well, probably was the best record in the last twenty-five years.

BAKER: Since the mid-sixties.

BYRD: Yes. So dealing with Reagan was a horse of a different color entirely.

BAKER: Did you sense a different attitude on his part at the beginning of the 100th Congress?

BYRD: No. Oh, no.

BAKER: Just business as usual?

BYRD: Business as usual. Just damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead. Hit the Congress over the head with a two-by-four. But we didn't blink.

BAKER: Presidents look at the recent presidencies, that is those presidents who served for eight years, there is a pattern to

be vulnerable during the last two years. Eisenhower had all kinds of troubles with Congress, and perhaps that is the way it will always be.

BYRD: Probably so, and Mr. Reagan was very vulnerable on the arms-for-hostages deal. And he was untruthful with the American people. That is a matter of fact. He ordered the Director of the CIA to circumvent the committees of Congress in dealing with that particular matter. He did this in a finding that was dated January 17, 1987, I believe. Eighty-six, perhaps. In that same finding he authorized the arms transactions, one of the objectives being to free the hostages. And he knowingly said to the American people on television that there would be no deals with terrorists, and his administration exhorted other friendly industrialized nations not to provide arms to Iran. He was taking the right position publicly. But out of sight he was doing just the opposite, and this caught up with him. It weakened the presidency. It hurt the presidency.

BAKER: This must have seemed to you like history was repeating itself. You came to the Senate, you cut your teeth in this institution at a similar time--1959, 1960 when there was a lot of disenchantment with a very, very popular president, a president who sort of lost touch with Congress if he ever had it to begin with. And then in 1973 and 1974 you had a position of

major leadership responsibility as assistant leader during the Watergate crisis. Then you see Iran-contra. What are your thoughts about that? Is there any hope? Is this a battle that is going to continue?

BYRD: I hope that the lessons that came out of both of these sad stories will not be lost on history. I must say that I, in spite of Nixon's missteps--and they were sad--that I liked him. He was well equipped to be president. He served in both the House and Senate. He was, in my judgment, presidential in his appearances. He had a quick mind.

I remember once when I visited Mr. Gorbachev I called the former Presidents: Carter, Ford, and Nixon. This was during the Reagan Administration in 1985, and I asked them what they would advise me to say to Mr. Gorbachev and what they would say if they were I.

With Mr. Nixon it was clear and succinct. It was as though he had been sitting at the television waiting for my call. And right off, he said, First, Bob, I would say to the secretary, Mr. Gorbachev, don't wait until the next administration to get an arms control treaty thinking that you will get a better deal by waiting. Get it now.

What the others said, I don't have any recollection at this

point.

BAKER: You mentioned, just getting back to President Reagan a minute, and his lack of understanding of Congress and lack of desire to engage the institution on its own terms, what about President Carter?

BYRD: Well, Reagan had a contempt for Congress. Mr. Carter had a clear desire to work with the Congress. Both houses were under the control of the Democratic Party, and we worked together. Mr. Carter, like Mr. Reagan, came to Washington without an understanding of the Congress; and both of them frequently referred to their dealings with the respective state legislatures. But Congress was quite different.

In the case of Mr. Carter, where we had the same in control of the White House as in control of the Congress, there was more of a working together, less confrontation. More cooperation. I think this business of divided government is not good.

Many people think it is a good idea to have the White House in control of one party and Congress in control of the other so they can watch each other, so to speak; but it's constant confrontation. That is not good for the country. We need one party in control of both the executive and legislative branches so they'll work together. They'll have a program for which they will

be held responsible together. there is just entirely too much naked partisanship when the government is divided. One branch stymies the other.

But in either event, the leaders of the legislative branch should always remember, in my judgment, that they are leaders of the legislative branch and that they are not to be the tools of the executive. He is the leader of the country. The President is the leader of the country. But even when he was of my own party, I always considered myself to be a Senate man. The Senate leader. I felt an independence of the executive branch. And I think that's the way it ought to be. I could never picture myself as being any president's man because I think that violates the constitutional independence of the branches and the constitutional equality of the branches.

BAKER: that sets up a fundamental basis for conflict between the democrats, in this case, in Congress and the democrats in the White House. You must have had a sense of that during the period of the Carter presidency.

BYRD: Not so much.

BAKER: Why not?

BYRD: President Carter respected the fact that I was a Senate man. I tried to be helpful where I could. Sometimes I differed with the president, but I knew the Senate. I knew where the votes were there, and the president knew he could depend on me. I had a great respect for President Carter. I think that history will recognize Jimmy Carter as having been a good president. He tried hard. He did some things that were good for the country. History will be kinder to him than his contemporaries were, including myself.

BAKER: Senator, were there any instances when you went to the Carter White House and said, Mr. President, this particular matter is simply not going to fly. We don't have the votes. This is not the time to do it; and where he said, I'm sorry, senator, I must move ahead as if we could get it passed?

BYRD: No, I don't remember any situation like that. I remember a situation where I said we don't have the votes. That was in regard to the SALT Treaty, and we ought not to press ahead with it. That was on the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviets. There was one other instance when we thought they could get the votes in the House, but we mentioned that in our foreign policy.

BAKER: At the time that you were conducting the Saturday

press conferences during the Carter Administration, did you have a sense that the press was trying to divide the Democratic Party using that medium? Run down to the White House, and get the President to speak out on an issue. Then run back up here and see if they could get you?

BYRD: No, No. I never felt that.

BAKER: That was never part of the dynamics?

BYRD: No.

BAKER: I'd like to back up a little bit. You spoke a lot about the minority in the Senate and the assumption that the minority doesn't have the votes. It doesn't control the committee chairmanship. Therefore, it is a structural disadvantage.

A number of members of the House leave the House to come to the Senate. One of the reasons that they want to come to the Senate, they say, is that the minority is taken a lot more seriously in the Senate institutionally--that the minority has a great deal more power. Even Everett Dirksen with very tiny minorities seemed to indicate in his candid moments that the minority power was greater than its numbers would suggest because of the institutional environment of the Senate.

Any observations on that?

BYRD: I think that's true. Let's put it this way, there is almost four and one-half representatives to every one senator. So it goes without saying that the smaller the group the more attention is paid to it when it comes to the Senate.

I think that Senator Dole has done an excellent job for the minority as minority leader. I think Howard Baker did an excellent job as minority leader. But they both had the president of their party in the White House which made quite a difference.

I was minority leader when I didn't have the president of my party in the White House. And as I say, not only that, I had something very much more difficult than having a president of the other party in the White House. But I think that they've done very well as minority leaders.

I did the best I could as minority leader; but when one doesn't have the votes, he can only do so much. I felt that my job was trying to build this party in the Senate to the time when it would again become the majority and to present our alternatives and to resist where we should resist, cooperate where we should cooperate. I think that paid off when we did become the majority party again in the 100th Congress.

BAKER: In that transition from the 99th to the 100th Congress, did you see that as a fairly smooth transition? You just said that you thought the preparation made the transition smooth, but there is still the structural problem of being a minority party one day and next Congress--all of a sudden--you've got the power to make the trains move again on your schedule.

Did that go smoothly from your perspective?

BYRD: Yes. It went very smoothly. Going from the minority to the majority was no great problem. We had been in the majority for so many years. Our great problem was going from the majority to the minority after having been in the majority for so many years back in 1981.

BAKER: And as party leader at that point, you must have been called upon for the schooling of a psychotherapist in a way to deal with senators who have formerly been chairmen of committees who now have lost staff, who lost some obvious clout. What was that like?

BYRD: It was very difficult. I had told some of my colleagues in 1980 that, come the election, they might find themselves without their chairmanships of committees and subcommittees. That is the way it turned out. We were all

depressed. Former chairmen had no committees to call at their beckoning. They could not have committee hearings. They could not schedule committee hearings of their own and control the schedule of the committees. They did not have as much control over the witnesses that appeared--over the selection of the witnesses. Having been in the majority so long, our democratic senators were kinda out there lost in turbulent seas. We were depressed. It was tough.

As minority leader I think in that situation I was probably criticized and blamed for some of the things that we were unable to do simply because we couldn't do them.

BAKER: You became the lightning rod for criticism?

BYRD: Yes. I became the lightning rod for criticism. Many of them expected me to be the spokesman for the party when, as a matter of fact, it was the House leadership that had the party that could deliver the votes.

A minority leader in the Senate who does not have his president in the White House is pretty much a paper tiger. And I don't like being a paper tiger. I don't want to threaten when I can't carry through. I was in no position to say, this will be scheduled. That will not come up. We will not take that nomination up. That nomination will never be put on the

calendar. That treaty will not be called up. I was in no position to do that.

Being in such a weak position, I did not hanker to be on TV. I don't know why anyone would want to be a minority leader, as a matter of fact, in that situation except that I did believe eventually we would regain the majority status; and I tried to prepare the party for that responsibility when it came.

BAKER: You never really had any experience being in the minority except for your first two years in the House. You had always been with the majority and rising in seniority.

BYRD: Yes. Exactly. That period did not constitute the best days of my life as it didn't constitute the best days of the lives of others of my democratic colleagues.

BAKER: I want to follow up on that. When you moved back into the majority in 1987, you must have had a new appreciation for the problems of the minority.

BYRD: I did. I did. I think, though, that the Republicans have been in the minority so long in the Senate that they seemed to be more attuned to it. They have so often had the president of their own party in the White House, which gives them

additional strength in the Senate--helps them to corral votes--to sustain vetoes, and so on. It always seemed to me that being unified came easier for them than for us.

BAKER: The unity--at least in the legislative sense--one might ask, it's easy to be united in opposition, in criticism. But it is harder to be united in developing constructive policies, in setting agendas. Is that your experience?

BYRD: Oh, yes. That is very true. It's easier to oppose than it is to propose and to carry through on one's proposals as a general rule.

BAKER: From your perspective as the new minority leader in 1981, what were your thoughts on the Republicans getting their act together to shift into this unaccustomed role?

BYRD: I thought they did very well and very quickly. I thought that Howard Baker and his leadership over there seemed to be made for the job.

Of course, they had their own president which was a heck of a lot different from my being the minority leader when I didn't have a president of my party in the White House. There is a great

chasm of difference there.

BAKER: Do you think that, standing back and trying to set aside partisan concerns, do you think that the change that occurred in 1980-81 and again in 1987 is good for the institution? Changing of party control? Some would say that the problems with the House of Representatives is that they haven't had a housecleaning there for many, many years. Maybe in the mid-seventies. But the same party has been in control since 1955.

BYRD: Well, I don't think I can make any enlightened comment on that. I only say that I didn't like being in the minority.

BAKER: From my own perspective, we encounter new committee staff directors and committee clerks who simply didn't know how to operate at the beginning of 1981. They didn't know how to run a mark-up. How to keep the minutes. This is all alien to them, and it resulted in a lot of questioning about how did we do this. And why did we do it the way the democrats did. And I'm not sure the results were improvement, but there certainly was a question about how the institution operates. Maybe future historians will have to look at that.

BYRD: I think the change in party control did make a

great difference when it came to the operations of the institution, the way the committees operated, and so on. But, fortunately, the committee staffs, for the most part, stay on and develop the kind of expertise that they need to have even when the parties change that are in control.

There's a different attitude and outlook demonstrated on the part of the way the committees operated as there was in the way the Senate operated. But I think that's to be expected because the two parties are different in their attitude, their outlook, their views of what ought to be done and what ought not to be done.

The Democrats have been in control of the Congress so long that I think from the institutional standpoint it's probably easier for them. They seem to be better at operating the institution. But they've had more practice at it.

BAKER: Yes. From my removed perspective I get a sense that Democrats tend to respect Republicans in general in the Senate. The majority tends to respect the minority more here than in the case of the House of Representatives where there hasn't been that change for a long time.

BYRD: Well, it's a smaller body. The relationships are closer. We see each other more often. It's a little more of a

family. It's a closer knit family than is the House.

BAKER: With all of the implications that the family metaphor brings--there is the strange cousins, and the crazy uncles, and what not--but you're still part of the same family.

BYRD: Well, we're exposed to one another daily, or at least more often. Our committees are smaller. The whole body is smaller, and I think it is only natural that things are more personal--less impersonal than in a much larger body.

BAKER: The father of that family, or the head of that family, Lyndon Johnson once said that the role of the majority leader is not only to schedule legislation and see what is going on on the floor, but also to know about the needs of all 50 states and specifically to know intimately the needs and the motivations--or at least the motivations of all 100 senators. That may be easier to say than to do. Is that possible?

BYRD: Well, that was easier to say than to do. And it's possible only up to a point. I think it's necessary only up to a point, and that point varies with different senators.

BAKER: I'd like to come back to that at a later point in the interview in terms of senatorial effectiveness and how one

becomes an effective senator--whatever that means.

But I'd like to ask you a very specific question. When you took over as majority leader in 1977, you established an informal committee of committee chairmen. I gather that that did not exist--that structure did not exist--earlier, at least not in the immediate past before you took over.

BYRD: Well, I don't recall that it existed. I'm sure that my predecessors called their committee chairmen together from time to time, but I think I leaned more on the committee chairmen than I did on the policy committee.

BAKER: Why was that?

BYRD: Well, I felt that they were the leaders of the little legislature. The committees are the little legislatures of the Senate, and the chairmen are the leaders of those various, distinct little legislatures. They knew how legislation was moving in their committees. I felt it was necessary that I work closely with them so that I could better schedule the legislation before the Senate and better prepare the schedule for taking up various and sundry pieces of legislation which varied in degrees of importance as well.

It seemed to me that those were the vital pressure points: the committee chairmen rather than a policy committee. As a matter of fact, I think each majority leader--each new leader--ought to have his own selection with respect to his policy committee and his steering committee. I think it becomes a problem when the steering committee just continues to be the same makeup and grows larger and larger with each leader.

Each leader promises to deliver certain things to senators who will vote for him, and he will promise a spot on the steering committee, or he will promise to get a spot on this committee or that committee for the support of the senator in the quest for the leadership. I don't think that always works. I did it. But I think that each new leader ought to have his own steering committee. He ought to start all over again. The steering committee has become much too large and one reason being that assignments were promised to get votes. I'm talking with respect to the policy committee and steering committee.

As to other committees, of course, I like the seniority system. I do think that a leader should consult with the chairman of committees before he starts making promises to try to get other senators on those committees in return for votes because those chairmen have to work with those committee members from them on as long as they are in the Senate. As long as the chairman and the Democratic members of that committee are in the Senate, he has to

continue to work with them; and I think that the chairman of the committee ought to have a considerable say in what senators are going to go on his committee. And they shouldn't be just up for grabs in order to get the leader votes to put him in office.

I've gone through that, and I've done the same thing. I think I'm in a good position to say that that's the wrong way to do it. But that's the way it works.

BAKER: There was strong pressures on you at the time you were seeking the leader's job?

BYRD: Yes, and I promised certain senators to try to get them on certain committees. When new members came into the Senate, I asked them, What committees do you want to be on? And many times I would seek to try to help them get on committees. My enthusiasm for getting them on those committees that they wanted was like the mercury in a thermometer. It went up or went down depending on how enthusiastic they were for supporting me for leader.

But at the same time, while I did that, I don't think it's the best. But that's the natural inclination of those of us who seek leadership positions.

But it works to the disadvantage of the committee chairmen

who have to work with those members year in and year out from them on. I remember Russell Long very often made a point with me when I was leader: I remember keeping in mind his needs as a chairman of his committee; and if he knew of two or three new senators or two or three new members--or senior members--who may be vying for a seat on his committee, Russell would come to me and indicate to me how he felt. He naturally wanted someone who would cooperate with him.

I feel the same way about my Appropriations Committee, but that's just one of the ways things kinda come unstuck. The cogs don't fit well in the operation.

BAKER: Committee chairmen have always guided the direction of the destiny of the Senate. Only within the last seventy years have we had formal party floor leaders, and this sounds like this is one area of genuine conflict or tension conflict. It's not going to go away.

BYRD: I don't know what you mean by conflict.

BAKER: Conflict in terms of point of view between committee chairmen and party leaders--party leaders, my understanding, trying to build supporters for him and for his leadership. What you described-- promising seats on committees--

is one way to do that. That may be very much at odds with the desires of committee chairmen to operate their committees according to their leadership. It's a leadership conflict--potentially.

BYRD: Well, it is a very temporary conflict.

BAKER: It goes away.

BYRD: Oh, yes. Yes. The committee chairman, when he gets the members that are assigned to committees, lives with it. He has to live with it. That isn't a conflict.

BAKER: That's an important point to underscore for sure. In the House of Representatives, it is my understanding, when a bill is reported out of committee and it goes on to the floor, it's pretty difficult to make significant floor amendments that are not in accordance with what the chairman and the overwhelming majority of the committee wants.

In the Senate, that's different. That must, again, sort of put a premium on cooperation between the majority leader and the chairmen.

BYRD: At times. Only at times.

BAKER: Then taking a slightly different direction, as majority leader, not only do you have to, it is my understanding, know what it is that the chairmen want but you have to have a pretty good understanding of the substance of the legislation.

BYRD: Not all that much.

BAKER: You don't?

BYRD: No. In some instances, yes, with certain legislation. But a majority leader is not going to make his business, nor does he have the time, nor is it necessary for him to try to absorb every nut and bolt and loose screw in a piece of legislation. He leans on his chairmen and the members of the committee. He calls it up, and then it's their ball to carry on the floor. It's not so much as that.

Now, with respect to certain pieces of legislation that come along, the leader--for various reasons--may have more involvement or may wish to involve himself more than in other cases. For example, when the Panama Canal Treaties came before the Senate, I became very involved as leader. I was not on the Foreign Relations Committee. I became very involved in the reshaping of some of the agreements. But that was the exception rather than

the norm.

BAKER: Just a final question, and we've been going on for an hour and twenty minutes, and it might be good to take a break on your schedule.

BYRD: I'm ok.

BAKER: In an earlier address you referred to the role of the majority leader in securing time agreements and how you probably secured more than any past majority leader. That's sort of an obscure issue to people outside the Senate or people outside the floor. Could you talk a little bit about the process of that?

BYRD: In the Senate it is necessary, because of the very fact that we are able to speak at great length on legislation--and that's one of the strengths of the Senate--we have what is referred to as unlimited debate. It becomes necessary, if one is to move the whole schedule along, to get unanimous consent on bills where possible to take them up, and to deal with them within a certain time frame. We cannot have both. We cannot have both unlimited debate and then go through these full cycles on each bill.

So in the House unlimited debate is sacrificed for speed;

and, therefore, the Rules Committee in the House is kind of the regulator or the traffic cop. In the Senate, we put a premium on unlimited debate.

Once the committee process has run its course and the committees have brought forth their products, the bill and resolutions are on the calendars--and nominations. Then, from the standpoint of floor action where we can get unanimous consent and move things quickly, we do that. That way we are able to have both unlimited debate, and we're able to move the legislative process along and enact the legislation.

But we depend upon the committees to do their work thoroughly. It is only then the more controversial legislation or the more important legislation--that's not to say that much of the legislation that is passed with unanimous consent is not important--but only some legislation, where there is any controversy, we won't get unanimous consent for a time agreement. Or if we do, there will be ample time built in for all views to be expressed.

BAKER: To some extent, the culmination of the legislative process has occurred before legislation gets to the floor?

BYRD: Yes. Like Wilson said when he referred to the committees.

BAKER: Looking back on the period of your leadership as party leader, if you were standing at the end of the 100th Congress--Robert Byrd at the end of the 100th Congress--and had the ability to speak back to Robert Byrd at the beginning of the 95th Congress taking over as majority leader, is there any advice that you would give to the earlier Senator Byrd?

BYRD: I doubt it. The situation was different then. When I first became the majority leader, I had the president of my own party in the White House which, as I have indicated, makes a difference. No, I don't think so.

I didn't have many regrets as far as my leadership was concerned. I always did my best. If the going became tough, I became tough with it. I did my best. I think I produced well as leader. I very, very seldom suffered any defeat as majority leader. There were a few times we didn't win whatever we set out to do.

One of the times I was not successful was in the case of trying to get the campaign financing reform legislation to a vote in the 100th Congress. I worked hard at it. There were some things I could have done better, especially press-wise. I felt pretty independent of the press, just like I did of the White House. Although I got good press and I think overall the press

was very fair to me, there were others who would have been on television more than I. Whether that is good or bad depends. I think one can be on television too much. One can say too much. One can talk too much, and one can say things which he will regret. I always felt that the less I said within what was required of me, the better.

The press often tried to get me to predict the outcome of votes. I always took the position we'll know that when the votes are in. I knew the potholes that come with attempting to predict what the outcome will be. I saw that in some experiences the House democratic leadership had under Reagan where the leadership predicted the outcome, and predicted the votes they had, and it didn't turn out that way. I always remembered that the White House had certain unique advantages when it comes to twisting arms and getting votes.

I always kept things pretty close to myself. Many times I didn't reveal my own intentions as to parliamentary moves to my own colleagues or even my own staff. If one signals where he's going to land a punch, he probably ends up on the mat. It will always come out on the floor.

BAKER: That's an interesting insight about leadership. You think of the leader that is out front, but often the leader is being very circumspect about his next move.

BYRD: Yes, I felt that it's one thing to have the cheers as one goes down the field. The important thing is putting the ball across the line and the score on the scoreboard. Then everything is revealed, rather than attempt to explain to every press inquiry and every colleague's inquiry as to what we are going to do next, or when are we going to do it. That's not important.

BAKER: That gets back to my earlier question about being outside spokesman as opposed to inside leader. I'm wondering if you have a sense if those demands, those pressures, have gotten greater?

BYRD: Well, I guess they are greater. Or they may not be. There are others who were better spokesman for the party than I, and I usually try to push them out front as committee chairmen. I felt the important thing for me was to get the work done, get the score on the scoreboard, and not take the chances of calling the plays publicly which might interfere with putting the score on the scoreboard.

BAKER: It sounds like it is a hidden peril for majority leaders--this temptation to want to have the answers for the press. Everybody likes to be able to predict the future, and I

hear you saying that that is something that needs to be watched very carefully.

BYRD: Well, sometimes I think that we may go overboard in our efforts to endear ourselves to the press. I don't think we need to do that. I was never one of the great press favorites around here, and probably--to a considerable extent--because of that reason. For one thing, I didn't have the ten-second sound bite. I thought it more important to put that score on the board. A lot of times that took a lot of work--back in the back rooms talking with other senators rather than being out on television or running up to the news gallery and trying to make a headline. I thought it was more important to get the work done rather than to explain how it is going to be done or how it was done. With each piece of legislation being passed we have another waiting in line.

I was elected by my colleagues to be the leader, and I meant to be the leader. Sometimes I didn't hesitate to do it my way. When I realized that others didn't like my way, if I felt that we ought to be there and get the job done, we stayed and got the job done. The 100th Congress--the record of it--will show it.

BAKER: Long after the sound bites and the headlines have been forgotten the record will be there.

BYRD: Yes. Exactly.

BAKER: The whole issue of record leads to a major line of questioning, and at a quarter of twelve I'm wondering if you would like to stop at this point and continue later, next week?

BYRD: No, there was one other question you gave me that I thought was a good one. The one you gave me the other day.

BAKER: The other day? Probably in regard to committees.

BYRD: I don't see it on there. There was one in which you indicated some people thought I was better.

BAKER: Some say it is the role of the Senate to which you are best suited--the whole issue of chairmanship. It does relate to our discussion about the relations between the floor leader and party chairman and also to press.

Your press has been pretty positive since you've taken over as chairman of the Appropriations Committee. Congressional Quarterly, several weeks ago, described you as the most powerful chairman the Appropriations Committee has had in a generation and said that this is the role in the Senate to which you are best

suited.

BYRD: Well, I doubt that. I feel that any role I have in the Senate I will do my best at it. I think I did a good job as majority leader in the first four years and the second time. A lot of the people are not around here now who were here when I was majority leader. Carter was President.

BAKER: Sixty of them are gone.

BYRD: As John Stennis said when I was chairman of the DC Appropriations subcommittee, you'll make a big job out of that. When I became secretary of the Democratic Conference, he said, you'll make a big job out of that. So I do not accept the theory that I do a better job as chairman than I did as leader of the Senate. The two are entirely different positions.

If I were a general, if I were a criminal lawyer, I would be good. If I were a minister, I would be one of the best evangelists because I do everything that I am called upon to do the very best I can. I can't say that I would shine in every position. Perhaps I didn't shine so much in the leadership position as some would-be judges should think I ought to shine. But they didn't know what I was doing to get that work done. That's leadership. It isn't the general who rushes out and makes

the headlines that is the best general. It is the general who develops the best soldier, and the best discipline, and the best loyalty, and who makes the best plan--develops the best strategy. He may not be a General MacArthur--on television or before the radio; but he may be a General Bradley.

BAKER: Because he knows where he is going and what is necessary to get there.

BYRD: He knows what is necessary to get there. He knows how to keep the logistics in line; how to bring up the supplies and anticipate the problems. That's right. I do the best I can.

In handling my job as chairman of the Appropriations Committee, I've been on the committee a long time. I've served under several different chairmen beginning with Senator Hayden, carrying on down through Russell, Ellender, McClellan, Magnuson, Hatfield, and Stennis. I've been on there a long time .

But I adapt the same approach as chairman as I did as leader. I try to develop a consensus on my committee. I try to develop strong unity. I support my subcommittee chairmen. I don't try to pull any surprises on them. I talk with them individually about their problems and about where I am seeking to go on a given matter. So we have developed a strong committee. Unified. We have a difficult job. We have far too few federal

dollars to meet the needs. We all would like to be in a position to do more.

I think that's the way I did as majority leader. I tried to develop, within my own party, a strong unity. When it came to long-term strategy as to the program, I talked that over with the chairmen and other senators. When it came to a lot of the political decisions, I talked it over with other senators with whom I had confidence.

This is the way I do on the committee. It is pretty much a different playing field.

BAKER: Do you think that this perception in the press--the conclusion we mentioned up front--has to do with a general understanding of what a chairman is supposed to do? It's pretty clear a job as chairman consists of certain activities. But maybe there is less clarity about the role of a floor leader--majority leader, party leader--in the Senate.

BYRD: Well, the press is generally lazy. They will write news story that contain the same old myths that have always been around. I don't say this about all of them. They're busy people, too. But so many of them don't do their work too well. They just run back through their files; and what was written ten years ago, they pick it up and say it again. In other words, a lot of them

still talk about my pompadour.

What their viewpoint of what a leader should be sometimes misses the mark. Widely. A gregarious politician can make himself very popular with the press, feeding them inside baseball and sometimes with considerable inaccuracies involved and certain prejudices built in. That was never my view of my responsibilities as majority leader.

I viewed that I had a certain responsibility with the press: not to mislead it, to answer the questions where I could--and wanted to. I didn't particularly care to signal my new move from a parliamentary standpoint in advance. I thought that could be determined after it was done.

In my view, the leadership was two percent public relations and ninety-eight percent hard work to put the ball over the goal line. Now, perhaps I was mistaken in assigning that kind of a balance. Probably was. I'm sure I could have done a better job from the standpoint of public relations.

Perhaps I assigned less importance to that aspect of the leadership than I should have. Part of it is my own nature which I've already indicated is not particularly a gregarious one. I perhaps am more serious than others would be. It isn't that I take myself so seriously, but I take my job seriously. I take my work seriously. I know that the element of surprise is important

in parliamentary warfare as it is on the battlefield. Consequently, I often kept my own cue points, as to parliamentary strategy, to myself rather than juicy morsels for the press sometimes to be able to say what I was going to do next. That would defeat my own parliamentary objective.

Some people are just better at television than I was. But to me that never was--and never will be--the important thing, as I view it.

BAKER: It really still remains to be proven whether that is really an important characteristic of a majority leader in this institution.

BYRD: But it has its part. It has its place, and some people are better at it than I am. But I figure I am better at some things than other people are, too.

BAKER: It strikes me that that is where the traditional Senate--as opposed to what somebody thinks of the Senate of 1990--where they come into conflict. You mentioned how poorly prepared reporters are. Some of them have a very dim understanding of the role of the Senate--of the institutional structure of the Senate. So how can they possibly have an appreciation of the leadership?

BYRD: And most of them don't seem to improve on it. I hope that my history of the Senate will benefit the media as well as my own colleagues. My colleagues now and my colleagues fifty years from now.

It's like I heard when I came here. There are work horses; there are show horses. It is the work horses who get the work of the Senate done. Show horses may make the evening news, make the headlines; but there is not a great deal under the surface. Somebody has to do the work.

BAKER: As Joe McCarthy proved. He made a career for a few years of making headlines. What have you done for me lately. Carl Hayden was one who made the comment about work horses and show horses when he was chairman of the Appropriations Committee when you first joined that committee and joined the Senate.

Do you have any lasting remembrances of how he conducted himself as a model?

BYRD: Well, things were very much different then. We didn't have the budget processes we have today. There was more money, it seemed, to spend. There was more money to meet the needs.

Today we are operating in a straight jacket with a \$3 trillion public debt and triple-digit deficits. It is a dramatically different situation.

BAKER: This might be a good time to conclude.

BYRD: OK.

Senator Robert C. Byrd

Interview - Part II

April 12, 1990

BAKER: Senator, I wonder if we could turn to the whole question of your achievements in the Senate. Obviously, there have been many, but those that you would most particularly like to be remembered by--those that you are proudest of throughout your whole career in this institution.

SENATOR BYRD: I'm proud of the part I played in bringing television and radio coverage to the Senate floor debates. I can't think of anything else in particular. I'm proud of the overall record that was established by the Senate in the 100th Congress. I'm proud of the input that I had in influencing the

outcome of the Panama Canal debates. I don't think of anything else.

BAKER: It seems to me that that says a lot about the nature of the role of the leader in the Senate. We talked earlier about the difference between the committee chairman and being the floor leader. Perhaps that's a reasonable answer. Perhaps at this point in the text we will be able to enumerate the achievements' of the 100th Congress just as earlier you did for the 1963, '64, '65 period.

The fact is, all of that came together and did get passed in the 100th Congress.

SENATOR BYRD: I hope that I brought a focus of attention on the Senate as a powerful upper legislative body, one that was independent of and yet worked with White House--one that was equal to the other body. I hope that I was able to create a greater pride in the members in being of the Senate. I hope that I was able to make the Senate a stronger voice in foreign policy. This is a tide that ebbs and flows, of course; but I feel during my majority leadership the Senate exercised an independent voice from that of the administration--and a strong voice in the formulation and implementaiton of foreign policy as well as in the enactment of legislation and the confirmation of nominations.

BAKER: Each of the Senate's constitutional perogatives has gotten very extensively aired during your leadership: the treaty role, the confirmation role.

SENATOR BYRD: The investigative role; the legislative role.

BAKER: It struck me that there was a thoroughness about the proceedings. Going back to first principles reminding not only the press and the public but also other senators as to what those principles were.

SENATOR BYRD: Yes, the Senate exercised a strong role from the standpoint of its approval of the ratification of treaties. We exercised that strong role in the ratification of the Panama Canal Treaties in connection with the IMF Treaty. It exercised a strong legislative role as was evident by its override of President Reagan's vetoes of the Highway Bill, the Clean Water Bill, the Grove City Civil Rights Bill. The legislative product of the 100th Congress indicated what the Senate was doing, where it was going, and how it got there.

The investigative role was strongly played during the Senate's investigation of the arms-for-hostage deal, the

appointment of the committee which worked closely with the House. The Senate--and the House--indicated that the legislative branch was not going to roll over and play dead, be requiescat (?) in its duty; and it exercised that investigative role.

NOTE: Dick, I've left out entirely the exchange between the Senator and you regarding an example of investigative role (Bork/Tower discussion)

BAKER: The beauty of your book and each of these chapters go into great detail about those roles, and this point in the manuscript we can use it to tie it altogether.

SENATOR BYRD: Of course, I'm very proud of the book--of the history of the Senate--because I think that correctly and carefully explains the role of the Senate and how the Senate has fulfilled that role under the Constitution through the 200 years of its history. And sometimes we have to pause and see who we are, what we are, where we are going, our reason for being, and whether or not we are fulfilling the expectations that our forefathers had a right to require of us.

BAKER: Somebody once said that to be able to distinguish between the continuity of the institution--recognize when something is recognized to the continuity as opposed to when

something is genuinely unique and precedented--needs attention to new approaches. That must be very difficult for a senator--particularly for a Senate leader to see the difference. You provided chapter and verse in your book.

SENATOR BYRD: I'm sorry. I guess I don't get the question.

BAKER: Oh, I'm sorry. It was more a comment than a question. I think I am just reaffirming what you were just saying about the book being there as a starting point for those who try to deal with it in the future.

Well, Senator, I'd like to shift our focus a little bit to the whole question of legislative effectiveness. In yesterday's Washington Post David Broder referred to you as one of the most effective Senate insiders in history. Effectiveness is probably different things to different people.

But to focus this a little bit, I'm wondering what advice you would have for a brand, new senator--someone you have never met before who comes into your office and sits down with you and says, Senator, help me. I really want to make something of myself in this institution. What would you say?

SENATOR BYRD: I would say you have to work to make it come true. I believe that what is seen as genius in most instances is mostly persistence, perserverance, hard work. If you want to be a good senator, you have to work at it. My advice would be that one should again apply the Scriptural admonition that Whatsoever thy findeth to do, do it with thy might. Whatever assignment one is given, do it with all of your might. Work hard at it. Know your subject. Do your homework.

Senators are quick to perceive the work that another senator does because it is shown by his grasp, his knowledge, of the subject matter. A senator will be listened to if he is perceived by his colleagues to be the one who knows what the subject is about and who knows more about the subject than others. I would say that that is the way to get the recognition of your peers. Show them that, even in the little things, you will master them. When you speak out on something you will have something to say that they will want to hear.

I think it is good to be a team player, also. There is room for the maverick, but in unity there is strength; and a party has the responsibility in the Senate, if it is the majority party, to develop its program and to enact the program. That requires senators who will work, and work together, and will be unified.

That doesn't mean that one must subordinate his conscience.

If he feels strongly in his conscience about a matter and that requires differing with his party, then he should differ with his party. Senators appreciate integrity, ability.

Senators are quick to recognize ability. One demonstrates that by what he puts into his task. If he puts work and dedication and thoroughness into his task, it will show in the product. Also integrity is a key word. A senator should keep his word with other senators. Once a senator breaks his word, breaks a commitment to another senator, this gets around. A broken vase can never really be put together again and be put out on the front shelf in the store front. The same with a broken commitment. Once disappointed the lost ground is not regained.

If a senator is fair, and if a leader is fair--even though you won't be able to please all of the senators or any of them at times--if it is recognized that he is fair, that covers a good many other things. So any member has got to deal with his colleagues as he would expect to be dealt with. He has got to be fair and up front. Candid. If he makes a commitment, he ought to keep it. And he ought to be able to take a position at some point on things.

I have found that some of my colleagues couldn't vote for me as leader, but they told me. They told me why. If they had already made a commitment, I respected that commitment. Others

were very slow in making up their minds. But once made I didn't have to worry about going back to check on them. Others never seemed to make up their minds. They just hoped the whole problem would go away; and, consequently, I never did get a commitment. Nor did I count that one either as being for me. And there were a few, from time to time, who sought by careful words to make me feel that I had their vote. But I was just as careful in listening to what they said, and I could distinguish between a commitment and something that wasn't a commitment.

BAKER: Thinking of our new senator who is here and that it is important to work and have integrity and be a man or woman of their word, then they walk out of their office and they go into their office. They begin to get organized--to be a United States Senator. My impression is that they must be absolutely assaulted with demands from various interest groups to pick up on my issue, decide for me on this or that.

How would you advise a new senator to begin to have enough space, enough maneuvering room, to take the time for deliberation, and thought, and study, and block it out?

SENATOR BYRD: Well, it's impossible to block out the time that one really needs and ought to have as a senator to think and reflect. There just isn't that much time with all the work

that we have and the growing amount of work. Although, one can really find more time than he thinks available to him.

I didn't find it too difficult to find some time. I don't play golf. I don't watch the trash that is on television. Very few television, other than the news. And I'm very careful watching that that I try to discriminate between the facts and the slant.

One needs a good staff. Someone once said to me that the sign of brilliance is the ability to gather around himself able people. A good staff is an absolute necessity here; and by and large, I have been able to secure and keep good staff people in my services here.

But a new person coming into the Senate should try to get himself a good staff. When I say good, I mean a staff person who is loyal, who is hard-working, who is able, and who voids absenteeism, drugs, and drink.

BAKER: I've heard you say that senators come to the institution oftentimes thinking they can have an impact on the institution, and they very quickly realize that the institution has even a greater impact on them.

SENATOR BYRD: That's true. Senators come and go, but

the Senate goes on. Like Tennyson's brook, it goes on forever. And it's greater than the sum of its one hundred component parts.

The Senate was the premiere spark of brilliance that came out of the forefathers deliberations. It is a continuing stage upon which we who come and go play our little parts. I've seen outstanding senators, but they were pretty soon forgotten after they left this stage. They were remembered for a few days, and then things move on.

Not many of us make marks on that institution. We may be influential somehow in changing the rules and precedents; and in that way, we do etch a little mark on the institution. But as a whole, we do make a mark on the institution. The mark may be temporary, but the sum total of us all makes a mark. It may be a mark for the contemporary observers, or it may be a mark that will last longer. But few instances in which a single senator makes an indelible mark on that institution. He may make an indelible mark on the history of this country. As a whole, we pretty much reflect the people who send us here; and we reflect, as Tennyson said--I'll paraphrase him--part of all that we have met and a part of all of our origins and upbringing.

The Senate is just as disciplined as we make it. It is just as good as we make it at a given time. The fault is never with the Senate as an institution. The fault is not in our stars but

in ourselves. There is nothing wrong with the Senate. Whatever is wrong at a given time is in those that make it up--that make up the body of it.

BAKER: Acknowledging that the Senate is a 200-year-old institution, it always strikes me as hard to understand how a brand new member can come in and become a senator of the United States in fact, as well as in name. I'm interested in your observations about that process of education. That has sort of been the theme of these chapters.

You've observed a lot of House members coming over. Is there anything about service in the House which, by itself, makes a better senator or worse senator or creates problems or opportunities?

SENATOR BYRD: I think it is good to have served in the House because one has the opportunity then to observe the Senate, at least from a distance, more so than he would otherwise. And it is good to know how they reach an understanding once he reaches the Senate. The fact that he has been a House member innures to his benefit in that he knows there is another body, has a cursory knowledge of how it works..

It has to be beneficial to have served in the House before coming to the Senate. All too often members of the Senate who

have come over from the House feel that the Senate needs to be changed and made more like the House. As time goes on, they perhaps learn better. The Senate wasn't intended to be like the House. It has its own rules and precedents. Some of those who most want to change the Senate rules are those who come out of the other legislative body, or who come here as governors, or members of state legislatures. It is awhile before they learn that the Senate is a unique body--a unique institution--was meant to be that way, should be that way; and we ought not to attempt to streamline its operations and make it an instant operation--like instant potatoes, and instant this and instant that.

They have to learn that the Senate was here a long time before they came here, and it did its work. It can move quickly. It can move slowly.

And sometimes it ought to move slowly. If there is an emergency, it can move with lightning rapidity, almost. So each individual should learn that he can't make the institution by himself alone. It was here. It was the product of the brains of very smart, and able, and wise men. And like the Constitution, it was made for all times. If there is anything wrong with it, we should look inwardly--or look in the mirror--and the usual thing, we will see what's wrong with the Senate.

BAKER: This suggests the next question. I'm wondering, in

your view, what do you see as the Senate's greatest institutional strength?

SENATOR BYRD: Its rules, and its constitutional powers. It's the fact that, in the Senate, there is no limit on debate except when we place a limit on it ourselves. That's one of the primary constitutional strengths of the Senate.

Also, its terms of service. It was built--and meant to be--a rock, a rock that would stand against floods and storms and hasty actions. The fact that it can amend is important. Not all legislative bodies can amend. Not all upper bodies can amend the actions of the lower body. But the Senate can amend. It can originate, except in the instance of revenue-raising measures which have to originate in the House. Even they--by the Constitution--can be amended in the Senate.

So the Senate has the power to legislate. It has the power to investigate. It has the power to approve the ratification of treaties and confirm nominations. It has judicial, legislative, executive, and investigative powers.

All of these powers make it unique. Its a continuing body in the sense that it never completely turns over. And it never will completely turn over except by an act of God or a catastrophic act. Should it ever be wiped out completely, that's not likely.

It's a continuing body, unlike the House; so there is always a very steadfast, stable mass--critical mass--there that gives it that enduring stability and perception of the long view. These are its strengths.

Its impeachment--its being the trial of the impeached individual. Going back to the time of Edward III, 1376, the impeachment of Richard Guyans(?) who was a customs officer. The Parliament saw that they had this power over the king's ministers and could get at him through the ministers.

BAKER: We're focusing on the strengths. The other side of that coin, the weaknesses. What threatens to undercut those structural strengths?

SENATOR BYRD: Well, the weaknesses are not in our stars, dear Brutus, but in ourselves. The weaknesses of that body is in the men and women who make it up. There also are its strengths--much of its strengths.

But it isn't the institution that is weak. It is those that make it up from time to time. Who bring discredit on it. Who seek to change it. Who do not appreciate it, never understand it, and never take pride in being part of it.

There are weaknesses that are not unique to the Senate itself. There is the problem that we have been having with

triple-digit deficits, the budget process, not having money enough to go around to meet the nation's needs. But this isn't just the weakness of the Senate, and it is not a weakness that will undermine the institution itself. that's not an inherent weakness of the Senate.

A weakness of the legislative branch--not only of the Senate but of the House--is the campaign financing methods that we today have which undermine the confidence of the people. That is a weakness that can undermine the strength of the Senate and the House. When the people's confidence is undermined, then the structure is weakened. And the fabric will fall.

BAKER: And you spoke to some extent on the whole campaign finance problems, and we have that in the record.

SENATOR BYRD: Yes.

BAKER: You mentioned the budget and the process by which Congress deals with setting budget priorities. After the Reorganization Act of 1946 they set up a budget committee that fell of its own heavy weight. In the mid-seventies a new budget mechanism.

One hears a lot of complaints that it is undercutting the power of committee chairmen to do their work on both sides--

authorizations and appropriations. What do you think about that?

SENATOR BYRD: It gets back to the scarcity of Federal funds to start with and also to the split government. We have an Executive Branch that doesn't work with the Legislative Branch in this field. Two different parties. Each vying for votes. Each playing games and using blue smoke and mirrors. A lack of common dedication on the part of both to grapple with the problem and be willing to come up with the solution which, politically, will be at least temporarily hurtful but in the long run would be recognized as being statesmanship.

This had its roots during the Reagan Administration, and both Democrats and Republicans are fearful that, if they come up with the tough answer, they will suffer at the polls--the tough answer being, there must be additional revenues if we are to meet the needs of the nation. Each side is afraid that the other side will clobber it.

Also, the Legislative Branch doesn't have the votes to enact tax increases because the President can veto--and has threatened to veto--any tax increase. And you only need one-third plus one member of either body to sustain his veto. It would be futile for the Democrats to try and enact legislation that meets a recognized, serious need. If we are ever going to get the deficit under control and meet the health needs, the educational needs,

the infrastructure needs, the foreign policy needs of this country, we're going to have to go to the American people and ask for more revenue.

The discretionary domestic side of the budget has been cut, and cut, and cut. If the two parties would sit down behind closed doors and agree to do what is needed to be done and each agree not to blame the other, but each agree to go out and work with the other in putting the program across, the Legislative Branch needs the support of the President because he wields the veto power.

The budget process itself should be fixed also. It was made for a different time. It was created for a different time. It needs to be fixed to bring it up to date. I think the theory behind it was correct, and we need to take a view of the whole piece of cake and how we cut it to meet the needs so that each appropriation subcommittee knows what every other subcommittee is doing. What our allocations are.

The trouble is we have run out of anything to allocate. There isn't very much to allocate among the subcommittees. They would have to appropriate across the government--across the broad range.

BAKER: You mentioned the need to update and to review and bring the structures into line with the needs of the modern times. That raises the question about committee jurisdictions,

and overlapping jurisdictions--the chronic problem looking way back in the history of the Senate. What do you think about that?

SENATOR BYRD: There will always be some of that. I don't think there is any way to have a perfect cure. It might be well if we would have instead of annual authorizations have two-year authorizations. I'm talking about budgets. Two-year budgets. But not appropriate that way. We need annual appropriations.

Senators serve on too many committees as well. I think I mentioned that already.

BAKER: Then that leads to the question of staff. Staff has grown enormously in your time in the Senate--has doubled as a result of some expansions that took place in the early seventies. There are those who say that this contributes to the fragmentation of the Senate, and it sets up a lot of policy entrepreneurs who want to get their senator's attention. What are your views on that?

SENATOR BYRD: There are policy entrepreneurs. There are those on staff who want to perpetuate their own work, their own importance, and all that. That kinda goes with the game.

But we need good staff. This is a growing country, a growing

population, with growing needs, growing problems; and we have to have growing staffs to meet these growing needs.

We also have an Executive Branch that proliferates in terms of staff. And many times our own staffs are meager when pitted against the overwhelming personnel mass of the Executive Branch. It's only natural that staff is going to grow.

Each senator has to be able to distinguish between what his staff recommended to him as necessary or what isn't necessary. No senator should permit himself to be completely led around by his staff. But the quality of the staff is what is important.

But even with that, the number is going to grow. Ours isn't a nation that is growing smaller. It is growing larger, and the demands on a senator's time are such that we need more staff. There again, campaign financial reform. If we could do away with this silly colossally gawdawful way of financing our campaign, senators would have more time to give their attention to the subject matter of their committees, and so on. As it is, more pressure is put upon the staff. They have to assume more of the load. There have to be some Indians that go along with the chief.

The Executive Branch! Once you look at the growth in personnel of the Executive Branch, if you want to see something like the prophets gourd that group up over Jonah's head overnight, they'll find it there. When you pit the pitifully small staff of

the appropriations Committees of the two houses against any one of the executive departments, you will see a giant as far as size in terms of standing alongside a diminutive pygmy.

BAKER: Senator, maybe this is the point to cast ourselves ahead to the quarter millennium of the Senate in the year 2039 when both of us will be fairly old. But if you were to have a message for those people who are standing and looking at the first 250 years of the Senate's history, what would you want to say to them?

SENATOR BYRD: I'll correct this for the record. I would say move not the old landmarks which Thy Father's established. We will be living in radically different times as the decades come and go, but there are eternal values that never change. And being a senator, one should not lose sight of the old landmarks and the verities and the values that made this a great country. We have gotten away from it.

One thing I would suggest to senators is that when they come to Washington they not be too easily swayed by the local media--by the big-city press. It is right, and it is wrong. And in all too many instances the pundits, who are within the beltway, know all too little about what goes on outside the beltway. And we, as senators, sometimes listen to the siren music of the metropolitan press here.

To put it in just daily terms, the Washington Post, for example. If one closes his ears and eyes to what goes on outside the beltway, he'll be pretty much out of tune with the rest of the country if he only listens to what the people who live in their ivory towers here would tell him.

So a senator who comes here ought to keep one foot--while he is in Washington--out there beyond the beltway. And one ear out there. And one eye out there, because the wind isn't blowing as the pundits here would have us believe it is blowing.

The great unwashed out there still sticks to the old landmarks. I'm old-fashioned. I'm glad of it, and I'm glad there are a few of us still around who lived during the Great Depression. I'm glad there are still a few of us around who still have a little of the coal-mine-community dust on our feet.

We have lost our sense of direction to a considerable extent. I've been here in Washington now in my thirty-first year, and I've been to one movie. And Yul Brynner starred in it. I was bored by it and walked out before it was over. I do watch good movies Video. Video movies at home. Alistair Cooke's pieces, Six Wives of Henry VIII, Elizabeth R. There are very few American actors who really know how to act. The British actors have it all over us.

Alistair Cooke's pieces are excellent. I seldom watch

television except the news. I watch Washington Week in Review pretty much because that's a show that lets you make up your own mind not try to make up your mind for you. I like C-SPAN because you see what is going on with your own eyes and listen to it with your own ears. Most of what we have on television is trash.

Television is a great medium, and what a powerful influence on the country it is. But our children watch too much of it. Adults watch too much of it. We ought to get away from that television screen and get back to the real world. Get away from listening to all of the things that make us violent.

In the same way with our reading. We reach trash. Few people are aware of Plutarch's Lives, or Emerson's essays, or Shakespeare's plays. Few people, relatively speaking. They don't go for good reading. Trash reading. Trash television. And, as I was saying a moment ago, I've been here in the Senate thirty-one years and in Washington thirty-seven. I've been to one football game. I went at half-time when we crowned the West Virginia queen--a game between Maryland and West Virginia, I believe. When we had the Washington senators, I attended three ballgames--two of them in one afternoon, a double-header.

Athletics has its place. And there is a proper place for it. We need to develop the body as well as the mind to learn good team work and all that, but we have our values standing on their

heads when the ballplayers and television anchor people--hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars. We have our values standing on their heads. When we've seen one football game, we've seen them all.

I enjoy sitting down and watching a football team on the television set. The problem is I'll sit there for three hours; and when it is over, I have nothing to show for it. I have actually wasted my time, because it is the same football game that I could have seen a hundred times. They are all alike. You catch the ball, you punt it, you kick it, you run with it, you fumble it, you butt your head against somebody else, you grab the ball that's fumbled. They're all the same, and it's such a great waste of time. And no football game ever changed the course of history.

The course of history is changed by the artists, the writers, the scientists, the mathematician. And the recording of that history is by the historians, and we judge the future by the past. We use history to figure out where the compass needle is pointing; where it is going.

We ought to be proud of our spellers. I have often gone into other states--I used to do some. I don't do much any more. Hear them brag on their football teams. I wonder how good are their spellers. We ought to encourage our young people to excel in

math, science, and the various disciplines.

There is room for exercise. There ought to be exercise for the body, but the mind should be exercised, and nurtured, and cultivated, and developed. That is what puts a nation on the moon--makes the nation the first to get to the moon. So we have our values standing on our heads.

That's why I push legislation to award merit scholarships--based on merit, based on excellence in their scholastic studies. Extra-curricular and athletic activities have nothing to do with it.

Well, also, we've become so sophisticated that we look with askance or contempt on others who believe that we still hold on to the old landmarks, that believe there is a God, that there is a life after death. We've become hardened. We've become cynics. That's our problem right here in Washington. Right here in the Capital City. We've become cynics. We listen too much to the cynics. We're influenced too much by the cynics. We ought to get back to our beginnings and get out there in the hills, and look at the trees and the open sky, get back to earth again. That's what made this country great.

My old mother, my old mother on her knees, was what influenced my life--my beginnings. There have been times when anyone will stray, but they have got that built into them from the

beginning--ingrained in them. They are going to come back. That is what we need here, and that is what we need to remember when we are senators.

We're not so great. We may have greatness thrust upon us because the people back home send us here. We ought to remember that the way that leads us here leads back home. It is those people out there and what they think. That fellow out there with his hand on the plow and his foot on the accelerator of that mining machine. That fellow out there on the street corner in the little rural communities--the women who stay after the church meetings and washes the dishes. The teacher in the rural school rooms. That fellow out there in that blacksmith's shop. That person out there on that boat in the stormy seas. The person driving that dog sled into frozen wastes of the Arctic. They are the people who count. They don't look on the world with such contempt. They don't have so much that it bothers them. They are still living at grips with life and making a living. They are out there in touch with God. They are what made this country great. We ought not to forget it.

So I'd say to those of the future, keep your feet on the ground, keep an ear to the windward out there where the real people are who think, who pay the taxes, who make this country great and make its wheels turn. Don't be swept away by these know-alls who know a great deal of nothing. Let's keep our values

straight.

Education is the best insurance for preparing for age. Never stop trying to learn. All of man's learning has barely scratched the surface of the best brain. Man has a lot of time, but not time enough. He ought to utilize it all as best he can to try to improve himself, make himself a better senator.

That sort of reflects the people who make it up, and the people who make it up ought to be made of steel and leather; because they are the people who hold the world together. All the trash we read and see on television and have blared into our ears needs to be washed out. We need to wash our ears out. We need to get back there and read the great classics and great poetry and touch hands with the spirits of the great.

If we had a hundred people over in the Senate who really stood for what they know in their hearts the people back home--I'm not talking about the interest groups, I'm talking about the great majority--really thinks and believes and voted that way, it would regain the confidence of the people and put the nation on a different course.

Nothing is politically right that is morally wrong. I realize there are a lot of people who have their own definition of what is wrong and right. But, again, go back to the old landmarks and one will always be pretty near the center of gravity.

I guess those are the things that are going to determine as much more than anything else the course of this nation. If senators remain flesh and blood and don't become mere robots of interest groups and political pundits and the so-called kingmakers in the media and in the parties, we'll always have a nation of flesh and blood that rises to its needs.

BAKER: It seems like a very fitting way to conclude a section entitled The Education of a Senator.

SENATOR BYRD: All right.

BAKER: Thank you, Senator.

SENATOR BYRD: Thank you.