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Senate Interior and Insular Affairs Committee, 1963-1974

Interview #1

Coming to the Senate

(Thursday, January 30, 1992)

Interviewed by Donald A. Ritchie

RITCHIE: I noticed that you were born in Arkansas. Is your family from Arkansas originally?

VERKLER: They were. My great-grandfather came down from Illinois. In fact his great-grandfather came from Germany and moved to Illinois and had several sons, two of whom went to the state of Arkansas to go into the timber business. There, my father's father, my grandfather, was born. My dad was born in Lawrence County, which is the foothills of the Ozarks and grew up along the Black River in a town called Black Rock, where I was born in 1932. My mother was from a place called Black Oak, which is over in Craighead County south of Jonesboro, the largest city in northeast Arkansas.

In fact, there is a rock group that came out of the area called "Black Oak Arkansas." Some of her relatives were actually part of that. She was a Thomas. My name is Jerry Thomas Verkler. We were in Arkansas up until the time I was six years old. Near the end of the depression we went to Detroit, Michigan, which is where a lot of Arkansawyers went. I guess it is appropriate now to say Arkansans. When I was growing up, we never wanted to say that. It was always Arkansawyers. But we went up to Detroit

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in late 1938. My dad found work, and we lived there for ten years during the war.

RITCHIE: Was he in the war industry?

VERKLER: He was. He helped set up industrial plants--I want to say a mechanical-handling type person--millwright. That was the job that he had. After the war began, like most of the nation, with the defense spending the way it was, he did pretty well for coming out of Arkansas, where he had washed out of the timber business. He had a varied type career. He even taught school. In those days, of course, if they found out that you could count to a hundred, as Bob Burns said, they made you a school teacher. But he went to college a couple of years. Taught school on and off. Tried to farm. Tried to sawmill. The timber business is a major part of my background in the sense that my dad always wanted to be in the timber business for himself.

He worked hard all of his life. He's still alive at age 85 and a half. But he was never a real good manager in that sense of being a business manager. Under capitalized, and so on. But he was a hard worker, and I learned that early, too, doing physical work in sawmills. But, in any event, he went to Michigan and did

pretty well. As soon as the war was over, he wanted to go back into business for himself in the sawmill, wood business up around the Detroit area. He bought some land for his sawmill in an area

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that was way out, and now it's the center of a shopping mall. We were too early! But because of sinus problems and other health considerations, we went to the arid state of New Mexico in 1948. I was a junior in high school when we made that transfer. We had lived in Royal Oak the last several years we'd lived in Michigan, which is a suburb of Detroit, and went to Albuquerque, New Mexico. My dad was going to start over building houses and doing carpenter work. He was a jack of all trades.

But that didn't last very long before he got wind of a sawmill out in the mountains west of New Mexico near Grants, Mount Taylor and started sawmilling again. I was going to high school at Albuquerque High School my junior year. I was an usher in a movie theater, at night, and made the grand sum of about eleven dollars and a half a week, which helped buy pinto beans in New Mexico in the fall of 1948.

Actually, ever since I can remember, even as a youngster, in Detroit, I was very thrilled to see the headlines and hear the talk that President [Franklin] Roosevelt had been reelected to an unprecedented third term. And then a fourth term. I was always interested in politics as a kid. I didn't know why, but it has always been one of my major interests.

When I moved to New Mexico, there was Harry Truman--the great underdog who was sure to be beaten by, Thomas Dewey. Of course, you know the history of that election. And this gets around to a fellow I started with later in the United States Senate, Clinton

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Anderson, who had been elected to the House in 1940, back when New Mexico only had one congressman.

He had gone to New Mexico about 1917 or '18. He was a young student at Ann Arbor. I think he was actually getting ready to go to law school or he was in law school, and I guess had a physical to go to war, the First World War. They discovered tuberculosis, so he went out to New Mexico, in effect, in those days to die, to live in a sanitarium. Well, he finally did it! About sixty years later after a great colorful career. But in those early days he started in the newspaper business. He was a journalist and jack of all trades. He got into politics and helped elect a governor. I think it was A. T. Hannett from New Mexico. The governor told him, after the successful campaign, that he could give him a state job, if that's what he wanted, but he would strongly recommend he not do it, that he go into business for himself and seek to find his fortune that way, which is what Senator Anderson did. He went into the insurance business and built a very successful one.

During the thirties, during the height of the Depression when the elected state treasurer defaulted or left office or couldn't be bonded out there, Mr. Anderson was appointed treasurer. Because, one of the reasons, he was one in New Mexico who could pass muster with the lending institutions. He was appointed state treasurer during the Roosevelt administration. By the way, in 1932 he was among a group of New Mexico politicians that were urging the nomination of Governor Roosevelt of New York for President against

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former governor Al Smith. I guess Al Smith was the leading contender, even in '32.

In any event, he became heavily involved behind the scenes in the financing of political campaigns, in an appointed position. And with the successful election of President Roosevelt, he became head of New Mexico's NYA, National Youth Administration for the state. Same time that Lyndon B. Johnson was in Texas, and he became friends early on with Lyndon Johnson. Then in 1940, the one House seat opened up, and there were about seven candidates from New Mexico Democratic politics. In those days it was heavily Democratic. They were vying for the nomination, and he won, I think, with 21 percent, and got the nomination and, of course, the office.

That was the beginning of his elected career, when he came to Congress. By the way, there was a young man, 28 years old at that time, who also got elected named Henry Jackson. He got elected that same year, 1940, to the House. They became fast friends from the earliest days. Another one was Hale Boggs of Louisiana. The Boggses and the Andersons were close, personal friends throughout their lives and careers.

But Senator Anderson came to the House and progressed. He was a shrewd man, a poker player. He got acquainted with a senator from Missouri. They became part of the same poker club. And the senator from Missouri got the nomination for vice president in 1944--Vice President Harry Truman. Then when he became president upon Mr. Roosevelt's death in 1945, shortly thereafter he appointed

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Senator Anderson to be Secretary of Agriculture. He was Congressman Anderson then, of course.

I guess I was leading up to that election in 1948 when Mr. Truman was heavily the underdog all over the country. Senator Anderson and several others, former governor [Robert] Kerr of Oklahoma, Congressman Johnson of Texas, they were part of that '48 class. He stepped out of the cabinet to run for the Senate. Now, his version was--and I think there is a lot of truth to it--that they thought that this strong class could help in the various states, help Mr. Truman. And I guess statistically you could show that. I'm not sure how much they led the ticket, but they were indeed strong senators and strong candidates.

On the other hand you could say--at least in his case--that he might be deserting the ship that was sure to go down. But anyway, that was a great, stunning upset. I

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was sixteen years old in Albuquerque, and a lot of my Republican friends had been telling me about the great victory of Governor Dewey this time. We had a lot of rousing debates when I was young. I was thrilled by that election, and Senator Anderson's election. Of course, I did not know him at all then. I didn't meet him--and didn't hear him speak until six years later when he was running for reelection.

But, I went to Albuquerque High School my junior year. During my senior year in 1949 they opened a brand, new high school in the east part of Albuquerque called Highland High School. Now they have I think a dozen public high schools. In those days there were only two. Highland was brand new, and as a senior, I had the

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option of going there, Since I didn't know that many people down at Albuquerque High, I went to Highland High School. In fact, this past summer, August of '91, we went out for a reunion of our class. The first four graduating classes had a big reunion celebration.

A friend of mine, Pete Domenici, who took Senator Anderson's Senate seat, although he went to St. Mary's, a Catholic high school, he married a student from Highland High School, Nancy Domenici. He was at our big celebration last summer.

After I finished my senior year, graduated from high school in 1950, I entered the University of New Mexico. In those days, thank goodness, you only needed one pair of levis because that's what most of us wore. And, if you were in my circumstances, which were pretty modest, you could get by. Then still having an interest in public affairs, politics, I entered with the idea of majoring in history and becoming a teacher and coaching baseball. I had always been athletic and played a lot of baseball.

About the second year in college, I decided I wanted to go to law school, perhaps, and switch into political science--government as a major. There was a professor there, he wasn't real young then, by the name of Howard McMurray from Wisconsin. He had been a political science professor at Wisconsin, and had been elected to the House of Representatives also in 1940. But he had greater ambitions. It might have been '42 that he was elected, because in 1944 he took on Alexander Wiley, a Republican senator from Wisconsin, and was defeated. In those days, the La Follette family had been running that state--I mean, they were the leading

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political figures with their mixture of progressives and what we'd call the liberal side of the Republican party. But Mr. McMurray lost to Senator Wiley in 1944. In 1946 he was going to run again as a Democrat and that was when La Follette was also up for election. And I'm not sure exactly--I'm a little hazy on what happened, except there was a young veteran named Joe McCarthy who did get the Republican nomination.

RITCHIE: He beat La Follette in the primary.

VERKLER: Yeah. Because I think La Follette had to run as a Republican. Then McCarthy won the race, of course, and I guess McMurray must have had the Democratic nomination again. If he hadn't run, I think La Follette might have run as an independent in November. But shortly thereafter Mr. McMurray went out to New Mexico. First he went to California. He went to southern California, and got tied up with his old friend, Helen Gahagen Douglas, who had served with him in the House and was being challenged by a congressman named Richard Nixon, who had been elected to the House in southern California. They were opposing each other for the United States Senate in the race of 1950. Howard was out there. He came to New Mexico after that race; but she was his friend, and he helped her in her losing cause. I think he taught a year or two out there. But he came to New Mexico to head up the government department, political science, and he never sought political office after that. His lectures were more like

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speeches; and, of course, to a young, liberal student in those days who was an old New Deal-Fair Deal Democrat and not entirely sure why, he was a very inspirational guy. I'd never been to Washington, D. C., but he fed my desire to participate somehow in the process.

And I did. I majored in government. Along about my junior year I knew that it was going to be very tough. I didn't know quite how to get to Washington. There were some people who were in public life, who as young students had gone to Washington. I can think of state senator Tibo Chavez, who had been lieutenant governor of New Mexico, whom I consulted with. I just dropped by to see him, because I had read about several of them coming to Washington, working in patronage jobs for their congressmen or whomever, and going to school at night, and so on. I had in the back of my mind I wanted to do something like that. But in 1953 during my junior year, and while the Korean war was still going on, I signed up with a Marine Corps program--platoon leaders class. If you went to training for a total of twelve weeks, and you could do it six weeks one summer and six weeks the next summer, you would then go into basic school as a young second lieutenant. I had no job, and I wanted to do that. I wanted to go on to graduate school somewhere, somehow. I'd played baseball in college, or I tried to. I never lettered because the first two years there were people ahead of me who were pretty good. My junior year it was just about the same when I decided I'd better give it up and work. Then the second baseman got hurt, but it was too late. I was a second

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baseman, and I might have gone on to letter. But I knew financially I had to work. So I worked for the Borden cheese people there every day while I was going to school delivering cheese to retail stores. That summer of 1953 I signed up for the Marine Corps. I came back to Quantico, Virginia for the six week's training and platoon leaders class. They called it the PLC program. I went back to New Mexico

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after the end of that program and finished my senior year; and following graduation, came back for the second six weeks and entered basic school in Quantico as a second lieutenant in the Marine Corps in the fall of 1954. I served on active duty for two years and came to the point of my active duty discharge and still hadn't nailed anything down as to Washington, D.C. But in the spring of 1956, I thought I would just take a flyer at it. I wrote a letter, a copy of which I still have in my files, to Clinton P. Anderson. I was going to start with the one I wanted to work for most, and then go down the list. There were only four then. Of course, there are only five now! During this period I had visited with Tibo Chavez as I mentioned. My parents at this time had moved from Albuquerque to Socorro which is seventy-five miles south of Albuquerque on the Rio Grande Valley where my dad had a little sawmill in that area.

I'd met Senator Anderson--I mean, shook his hand--when he came to speak at a meeting of Young Democrats my senior year. I was vice president of the University of New Mexico Young Democrats. He was campaigning that year, and I met him. And knowing of his

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background in the cabinet and the House, he was the kind of guy I really wanted to become acquainted with or associated with. But that was beyond my wildest dreams.

But when I was a first lieutenant by this time down in Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, I wrote him a letter and told him I wanted to come to Washington and go to school, and wanted to be considered for anything. I was thinking of elevator operator or whatever in those days. I was going to New York for a wedding of a friend of mine who was in the service with me, and I guess I told him I would like to stop by. And so he wrote me a letter and said, "Come on by when you're here." I went right through cloud nine on that. Later, knowing how things worked, I realize how lucky and how opportune that was. He was looking for someone--getting ready to--and there I came along, without any political contacts at home, so he didn't owe anybody for me. No father had been a political contributor, participant, etc. It was strictly between us. He could have gotten rid of me without any political repercussions if he'd wanted to.

Anyway, I came by and interviewed with him in May or early June after the wedding up in Long Island. And we made a deal. He offered me a position to come to work in his office when I was discharged. Boy, I was on cloud nine at that point! I entered George Washington University law school in the night program, which was not uncommon for people in those days and may still be done. I know some youngsters still go to school at night. But I started working for him when I got discharged. I left Camp Lejeune on

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August first and started in the office on August third. I had a room in Georgetown. There were some friends of mine I had known, but we only stayed there about a week, or I did, until I got together with a couple of others, and we rented an

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apartment on P Street between 16th and 17th northwest. One of those old row houses. We had the second floor.

It was kind of an elegant old place. At one time it was quite a residence in this city. Now it's been torn down, and the Trucking Association built a building there. Now they're in Alexandria, their main headquarters. I'm not quite sure what's there now. It may have been torn down again for all I know.

But I started in working for Senator Anderson on his personal staff. My first job, as I say, I started August 3, 1956. Congress had just adjourned sine die for the '56 campaign, President Eisenhower's reelection campaign. A few days earlier, maybe August 1, or something like that, Senator Anderson had already gone to New Mexico. In those days he drove back and forth twice a year.

My first job during the recess was microfilming files. They were getting ready to start saving files and microfilming. I was removing staples from letters, etc. That was my first job in his office, doing that kind of work. I kept attempting to get more and more assignments from the administrative assistant, Claude Wood. Gradually, I was allowed to write letters and do some constituent case work and tasks of that nature.

RITCHIE:: Good time to start. Things were pretty quiet I bet.

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VERKLER: It was quiet. Of course Senator Anderson was asked by the Democratic Committee and others to be helpful during the campaign which, of course, he was. He was fond of Governor Stevenson. I always thought--this is maybe jumping ahead--Adlai Stevenson made a serious mistake in not leaving the country about the beginning of '56 or a little thereafter and going on a sabbatical somewhere and staying out of it because in 1960 he may have had a better shot at coming back and getting the nomination. But I guess those folks that run for president feel that this is the time. It's always this is the time, even though history would have shown that, unless you're in pretty difficult times, a sitting president gets reelected with regularity. In this century we can count them on three fingers, I think. [William Howard] Taft got defeated for reelection because Teddy Roosevelt got into the race as a Third Party, Bull Mooser. And President [Herbert] Hoover, we know what happened to him. Those first-termers who sought reelection. Then, unfortunately for him, Jerry Ford was not elected. He was appointed, and he just barely lost when he ran. And Jimmy Carter because of the "malaise" that was going on was defeated.

But those are the only times a sitting president has been defeated in the 20th century. I think Adlai Stevenson might have fared better than the young senator from Massachusetts in 1960, and the majority leader even if he had come back strong and sat 1956 out somehow.

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But he didn't, and Senator Anderson was asked to help, especially in agriculture and conservation issues and put together some position papers, which he did. I wasn't too heavily involved in that, but there was a guy down at the campaign

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headquarters responsible for that, by the name of Ben Stong, who was on loan to the campaign that fall. Subsequently I worked very closely with Ben in the old Senate Interior Committee on some very great, I think, great programs that we put together in the early '60s and mid-60's.

That was my first job. Then when the senator returned the 19th of January in '57, I did more substantive work, case work. That is when I started doing that heavily. The biggest personal break for me in a real sense came at the end of that first full year from August '56 through the end of the session in 1957. Senator Anderson invited me to stay out in New Mexico that fall with him in his Albuquerque office. That meant dropping out of law school--and also [chuckles] at the same time--they had started this military reserve unit up here on the Hill.

I was a member of a composite Navy-Marine Corps unit. They'd just begun that summer, and the first two weeks of active duty was going to be on a cruise for us. We were going to go by ship that year to NATO in Europe. I had never been to Europe and had always wanted to go. This would mean giving that up. The senator learned about it, and said, "You don't have to do it." I very wisely chose to say, "That's okay, I can go to Europe some other time." Because, as you know, if you're young and ambitious, this was a

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chance to really work personally with him. That fall I spent out in New Mexico until Congress began in '58, and I worked for him. I drove him around. Worked on cases, people coming into the office. It was a great personal opportunity for me to be around this gentleman whom I considered--and he was a great man--even at that time. He was about 64, maybe. I think he was 62 when I started working for him, maybe 63. Well, he was born in 1894 so I guess we can figure that out.

I worked in Albuquerque. My folks still lived in Socorro, so I roomed near the university with a lady who had a rooming house that I lived with the last two years I was in college. I got very established with Senator Anderson.

When we came back in February of '58, he divided up his staff assignments. I became the staffer who worked on his Finance Committee, tax legislation, primarily. Claude Wood, his administrative assistant, looked after the bread-and-butter, Interior and Insular Affairs, because in New Mexico, land and water resources were extremely important. The other fellow in the office, the one who was his press assistant at that time, Doyle Kline, his responsibility was Atomic Energy issues. The Senator chaired the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy. He had a three-pronged division of labor there. My job was Finance, to look after that. That was challenging and interesting. It gave me some real insight into how important it is to the economy and to business. Also as we approached '58-'59, his good friend, Senator Lyndon Johnson, the majority leader, had ambitions

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for the White House. Senator Kerr and Senator Anderson were trying to help him. And as you will recall, during that period, although President Truman had

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called for it earlier, one of the big thorny problems--as it is today--was addressing health issues, particularly for the elderly. There was no program, really, to help them as far as their health expenses were concerned. People of modest means had to depend on family, and at least, there was Social Security as a floor--a small floor. But they decided to try to come up with a program to meet the health needs of the elderly.

Now Senator Anderson and Senator Kerr, who were close personal friends also, served on the Finance Committee together. In fact, if I'm not mistaken, Senator Anderson may have supported Senator Kerr in one of his ambitions. He had presidential ambitions for a little while.

RITCHIE: Yes '52.

VERKLER: Yeah. And so did Richard Russell from Georgia. Clint, I guess he was kind of committed to Kerr, if I remember correctly. But he was also very fond of Russell, and thought Russell, because of his individual capacity, intellectual capacity, would be a good president, even though out of the South. That was almost unheard of at that time.

Subsequently, Lyndon Johnson moved Texas from the South into the Southwest! [laughs] He became a Westerner. Anyway, they were assigned the task of coming up with a solution for this problem of

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health care for the elderly. But they took divergent views. Senator Anderson took the view that it should be tied into the social security system so that it would not be based on need but on an insurance concept of entitlement.

And Kerr took what became known as the "Kerr-Mills" approach to be administered by the states in kind of a--my memory may be a little hazy here--but it was more discretionary, welfare-oriented as opposed to what we thought was the dignity of an insurance program tied to social security.

As you know, that is what eventually passed--the Medicare program as we know it today. It was signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson. It did not help him in the campaign for the nomination in the campaign of 1960. I mean, he lost to Kennedy, but Senator Anderson had started down that road of leadership toward providing health care for the elderly.

RITCHIE: But Johnson was the one who really pushed him in that direction?

VERKLER: That's right. It was becoming, in the late 50's, a real social issue. Even though it's been abused, perhaps, and highly expensive and so on as a public expenditure. In those days there was nothing! It was a real problem for folks who were retired or past sixty-five. If I remember correctly, the initial kickoff was age 67, or at least that was in the program when we started the benefits.

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In those early days, I was involved in it. I was very lucky to be involved. I remember the first, real backroom conference with Wilbur Cohen, a professor from the University of Michigan, who became Kennedy's secretary of HEW. But

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Wilbur was an expert. He had been, I guess in the Roosevelt and Truman administrations, a key player in Social Security and all of these health and social programs. And then during the Eisenhower years he was a professor at Michigan, I guess. Then there were a couple of people from the Library of Congress, Fred Arner and Helen Livingston, I believe that was her last name. They were the numbers people who could come up with figures and tell you how much it would cost to do what, to furnish what benefits. And a guy from AFL-CIO, if I'm not mistaken, whose name kind of escapes me right now.

RITCHIE: Was it Biemiller?

VERKLER: No. It wasn't Andy Biemiller. It was one of the professional staff, as I would describe him, who was their expert. Anyway, Andy, of course, was the premier labor lobbyist in those days. But, anyway, we grabbed it there in the back room of Senator Anderson's office and put together the basic concept.

It grew and developed. Cecil King of California had the House version. It was in the Senate, though, that summer of 1960 after the determination of the candidate--Senator Kennedy--instead of the Anderson proposal, it became the Kennedy-Anderson proposal. Subsequently, when he went to the White House it became King-

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Anderson. He kept pushing it forward until, as you recall, I guess in '64 or '65 after the president's death, President Johnson took the bill that had been passed and signed it in Harry Truman's presence out there in Missouri. He flew out there to sign Medicare.

RITCHIE: In '62 you took the big fall on it, though. That was when Anderson lost. When Kennedy proposed it, and Kerr got the votes to defeat.

VERKLER: Kerr never wanted it to go as part of Social Security. And, of course, Wilbur Mills was a very, very powerful chairman of Ways and Means at that time. And the Kerr-Mills approach was the one that they went forth with at that time.

RITCHIE: Everyone was shocked when Jennings Randolph voted with Kerr on that one.

VERKLER: Right. Yes, I'm not quite sure what all went on; but I used to say in those days that Kerr ran three committees. When Johnson assumed the vice presidency, he officially took over as Space Committee Chairman. But he was a major domo, and had been for years, on Public Works. Dennis Chavez of New Mexico was the chairman, but he was in his declining years. In fact he died, I think, right after the election in '62. I had been on the airplane flying back with him and Mrs. Chavez.

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I had worked in that campaign out in New Mexico in 1962. I had taken vacation to go out there and work in my home area which, at that time, was Socorro. I flew back to Washington with Senator Dennis Chavez and his wife in November, and then less than a month later he was dead.

But Kerr ran that committee. As I always said, if he had lived just a couple of years longer, Oklahoma City would have been a major, thriving seaport! [laughs] They do have lots of water and canals, much of it due to his efforts on Public Works. Anyway, Senator Kerr also ran the Finance Committee. He was a major domo of influence there because Senator [Harry] Byrd of Virginia was also declining. You know, he's another one who had been governor of Virginia in 1932 and wanted to support his conservative friend, the governor of New York, Franklin Roosevelt. You remember that later he became disillusioned with the New Deal, I guess.

But Senator Kerr was one of the most powerful senators in office during the late fifties and early sixties. I always thought that the troubles they had back in '62-- Bobby Baker and his troubles--would never have happened if Kerr would have lived longer. Bobby Baker, you know, had worked directly for Lyndon Johnson. When Johnson became vice president, that's when Bobby's troubles really began, because I don't think he had much to do!

Mike Mansfield, although he wanted Bobby to stay--and I remember hearing or reading about how he'd take the Majority Leader job only if Bobby Baker stays as secretary to the majority. He never did become Secretary of the Senate, as you know. Skeeter

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Johnston was in those days. But Mike made that statement. After LBJ left was when Bobby had more time to go around and get into some of his personal business and got into some difficulty. Rumor has it Johnson told him, well, "go see Kerr."

He went to see Kerr. Unfortunately, just about a month after--less than a month after Senator Chavez died--on New Year's eve, Senator Bob Kerr died. He'd been in the hospital with some heart trouble, and he'd had heart attack and died. That was New Year's eve, December 31, 1962.

I remember during the fall of '62, during that congressional period, we were in late in the year. I think I said earlier, when I started on August 3, 1956, they had just adjourned. And that was the longest they had been in session for years and years.

Senator Anderson had a health problem. It was kind of one a year there for awhile. As you know, he was an arrested tubercular with a heart condition, and he had his gall bladder removed in the fall, I think, of '62. He left Washington early to go down to Albuquerque for that operation. He had his gall bladder removed, and he was thinking or talking, "Well should I come back?," because they were still in session after his surgery. He was thinking about doing that. On the old Senate subway, that little old rail car over there in the Dirksen Building where it goes in toward the Capitol, I remember Senator Kerr wagging his finger in my face and saying: "You tell him I said not to come back here! To take care of

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himself because he shouldn't come out here and jeopardize his health. We're going to be gone soon enough," etc.

I passed that word along, I mean, I'm sure Senator Anderson knew what he was going to do anyway. But he might have felt pretty good to hear Bob Kerr was saying that. Ironically, three months later, Bob Kerr was dead, and Clinton Anderson lived until 1975. I think he died in December of '75.

Anyway, Senator Kerr was a very powerful United States Senator, and he had a different view of how to treat this [Medicare]. So did Wilbur Mills, and they were close. Senator Byrd in those days could not even talk too clearly. He was the chairman. It was another instance of the old chairman, the old senators staying with all their seniority probably a term or two too long!

In Senator Anderson's case, when 1966 came around he also ran again and should not have done so. Meanwhile, going back to Kerr's death, that changed my own personal life to a considerable extent. Because during Senator Anderson's illnesses of '61 and then again in '62, he had two years in a row, I became very close with the ranking member who was Henry Jackson of Washington state. Senator Jackson was a bachelor until he was 49. In 1960 Senator Anderson hired the daughter of one of his oldest and closest friends and political allies out in New Mexico, Mage Hardin. His daughter, Helen, whom I had known briefly, was a year behind me in high school at Highland. I knew who she was more than knowing her very well because she was in a slightly different

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social strata than I was. But she was a very attractive and a very nice person. He hired her. I think she had had an unhappy first marriage and had come to Washington to work for Senator Anderson as our receptionist. Senator Anderson played cupid with his old buddy, Senator Henry "Scoop" Jackson of Washington. Two or three times a week, at the end of the day, Scoop would come over for tea in Senator Anderson's office and met Helen, and the social-personal affair developed which, at the end of one year, ended up in a marriage proposal. I'll never forget, because as I said, I worked pretty closely with Scoop during that period because Senator Anderson, the chairman, was out with illnesses. We needed the ranking member to carry on. I was doing the administrative work. He hired Helen at the beginning of '61, getting ahead of myself a little bit here, but in the beginning when Senator Anderson was reelected in 1960 at that time with the largest majority or percentage in New Mexico's history--and Kennedy barely won the state. That was an instance where an important senator's help carried the state--I'm convinced--because I think Kennedy won New Mexico by 3,000 votes. Senator Anderson won by 80,000, which was unheard of in those days.

But he became chairman of the Senate Interior and Insular Affairs Committee. Old Senator [James] Murray of Montana did not seek reelection. He'd been propped up for years by his son and a few others. With the election of President Kennedy and Senator Anderson becoming chairman of that committee, he moved me from his

personal office, from one of his legislative assistants, to the committee staff. I started at the beginning as assistant chief clerk, because he did not remove the current chief clerk. He made a tremendous cut in staff at that time, I think we ended up with thirteen or fourteen professional staff. Because with our administration going in, there was no need to have a lot of people watching the other party's administration. At least that was one of the reasons given for cutting out a lot of the staff. He thought, and I think the word was out, that the Senator from Montana had used the committee posts as real patronage spots. As a matter of fact, the Senator's son got into difficulties some time later in the old Chinese, ship-jumping era, when people would be putting in bills to keep illegal immigrants in this country. That happened, and he was associated with that. Anyway, I went on the staff of the committee on Interior and Insular Affairs because Senator Anderson became chairman. That's when I got to work with Senator Jackson, and got to know him very well. I got married myself in 1960. In 1961 when Helen came to work--Helen Hardin--she met Scoop, and they had a romance and got married. My wife and I, and our two-month-old baby who was squalling her head off, drove Helen to the Baltimore airport to fly to Albuquerque where she was going to meet Scoop for the wedding. They got married in that late fall or winter out in Albuquerque. I remember we drove Helen to the airport. Then in '62, when the Senator had his gall bladder attack and had that removed, I worked again closely with Scoop. When Senator

Kerr died on New Year's eve, 1963, January 1, '63, Senator Anderson had to make a choice. As a senior member and a former chairman of the Interior Committee, there wouldn't be anything on Interior that he wanted that he could not get! Subsequent events proved this, as we led the battle for the Wilderness Bill and other things. He was still the ranking very high member; he really never became ranking on Finance, at least during his good years.

RITCHIE: Russell Long was always there.

VERKLER: Russell was the youngster in between Kerr and Anderson, who incidentally had served on the Interior Committee when he was first elected. He was also in the class of '48. But when they were fighting the Tidelands battle, he came on the Interior Committee which had jurisdiction. Then when that was over, he got off. Anyway, he was always in between Kerr and Anderson on Finance, because he had gotten appointed to Finance before Senator Anderson did.

Then when Kerr died, he became the ranking member. I think Clint was behind him, so I guess for a little while he was the ranking member of Finance. But he decided to chair the Space Committee to try to help New Mexico. To try to bring more of whatever opportunities there might be to the state because, as I say, he could get everything that he really wanted from Interior.

When he first came to the Senate, he served on Agriculture for awhile, having been Secretary of Agriculture. Of course he sort

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of split with his successor on the [Charles] Brannan plan. He was always kind of a maverick, or at least he felt he was! He wrote this book which, incidentally, I was supposed to play a larger role in than I ended up doing, *Outsider in the Senate*. I was to help on that and do a lot of writing for him when I came back in 1958 from New Mexico. He offered me the opportunity to really participate in that, but I really wanted to go back to law school. Working full time and going to school five nights a week, I didn't get into that book that much. Eventually he had this outside writer who helped him on that.

I had ghosted an article in another book. There was a book put together on Indians and Indian battles which he authored a chapter called "The Canyon De Chelly" which is a great Navajo battle. That was my research that helped him on that. So he thought, I guess, that I could do this other. But I really did not get involved in that. He flirted with that idea of writing that book for a long time. Then there was some professional writer, whose name escapes me now, but it was on the jacket because he helped him. He collaborated with him on that. When he wrote his book he, I think, many times thought of himself, or wanted to think of himself as an outsider in the Senate. To me, he was a consummate insider, really, because of his relationship with the majority leader and his contacts and relationships with the national party and with other key Senate members. I think he was responsible for denying the Secretary of Commerce job to [Lewis] Strauss during the latter part of the

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Eisenhower Administration. He wasn't on the Commerce Committee, but Strauss, who had been chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, was a guy that Senator Anderson did not get along with too well. I think Strauss made the big, big mistake in public life of never being able to say, "Well, you know, I might have been wrong about that, and, if so, or if I offended you or if I did something wrong, I'm really sorry about that." He was a guy that was maybe often in error but never in doubt, as they said about the court one time.

But, anyway, in 1963 I moved over to the committee as his man on the committee.

RITCHIE: Which committee?

VERKLER: Interior and Insular Affairs. I became assistant chief clerk. The fellow who was the chief clerk in those days was chief of staff. Under the Legislative Reorganization Act, you didn't find the word staff director. He was the clerk. Actually, I don't even think he was chief clerk! I'm not sure. It was clerk and assistant clerk. [laughs] But that gentleman went down to the Kennedy Administration. Dick . . .

RITCHIE: Callahan?

VERKLER: Callahan. In fact, have you ever done an oral history with him?

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RITCHIE: No.

VERKLER: He might be a good one. Anyway, Dick was a fine guy. Went down to work in the Space Administration. I believe he was NASA's first congressional liaison guy during the Kennedy Administration.

I had the option of going with Senator Anderson to the Space Committee, because I was from New Mexico. Senator Jackson asked me to stay at Interior. [chuckles] This may not be something I would want to release right away--but Senator Anderson had two sides to him. One was the great, the brilliant, the intellectual side. But he could also be mean. In the words of Bill Clinton, "a mean son-of-a-bitch." I'll never forget what I was asked by some of my fellow workers when he went down to have his gall bladder removed. They said, "Would you please tell the doctors, while they've got him down, to cut that mean streak out of him!" [laughs] He could be mean!

There was a lot of tension in his personal office, as is the case most everywhere; and I'm sure there is a lot of it going on now. He seemed to be a guy--like a dog trainer who holds up treats for his dogs as they leap up. He seemed to delight in that a lot! That was another side of him--not the distinguished side. But he was a *great* man. And he was a *brilliant* man, when he was in his prime and even into his sixties, until his final illness that overtook him.

There were some personal tensions in his office. Not just with me, as I was no longer right in his office. I had the best relationship with him that anyone could have when I moved over to the committee. It was only getting better for me, personally, because I did not have to contend with some of the personal rivalries and relationships in his office.

But! As time for a decision came closer, I did have a couple of blow-ups. Senator Jackson had offered me the chance to stay on. I told him this one, particular fateful day, I said, "Well, Senator Anderson wants me to go with him, and I think that I will do that."

I got into a *whale* of a conflict that day with the senator's personal office over something fairly insignificant--maybe relating to getting to him for an answer on something. As a result I said to myself, "Boy, do I really want to put up with this any more?" And I called Scoop Jackson personally, and I said, "Is that offer still open?" He said, "Yes!" So then I made the decision to make that break, to go to work for Scoop as his staff director. [laughs] Scoop, like other senior members, were entitled to have appointees on the committee to look after his subcommittee. At that time it was territories. He had a great interest in territories. Of course, Alaska, was important, and he was a leader in the statehood fight and had been a friend of Alaska because of Washington state's relationship. So he brought in these youngsters--young attorneys--or whoever, and they were his appointees on the committee. He brought one in in 1962 to replace one who had been there and left. This

young man told him, "You know this title 'clerk' is for the birds! That doesn't designate what the person really does. He's really staff director." And Scoop changed the title immediately. I was "staff director." I always felt I owed that person a favor, because two years later, then in the famous Goldwater year, he went back out to his state to run successfully for Congress. He's now the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Tom Foley, who's an old friend and a great man, in my judgment. He's another one who is very brilliant. I mean, Tom is a very smart person.

Anyway, I became Scoop's staff director on the Senate Interior and Insular Affairs Committee.

RITCHIE: How did Senator Anderson react when you went with Jackson?

VERKLER: Well, it was okay with him, because, actually, to be perfectly fair, I had offered to go with him even though he wanted to bring to Washington Frank Deluzio who was a technological expert. Going into the Space committee he needed somebody like that. And I said, "That was fine with me." There was only one top salary which I was now getting at Interior and Insular Affairs. I said, "I would be willing to step down a notch salary-wise to do it." Because, you know, the Senator, as I said, as a boss he could lift you to the highest horizons, and you could be very inspired. By the same token, on a personal side sometimes, you could really

be dashed--not just by him but some in his operation--people he had in his office.

RITCHIE: Sounds a little like Lyndon Johnson in those days.

VERKLER: Well, [chuckles] yes. In a way they were a lot alike--based on what I know about Johnson, whom I really admired and about whom, I think, Robert Caro went beyond fairness, no matter how he protests. I read the first book and I have the second one, which I've not read yet. I'm still sort of burning over the first one! I mean, I think that was unfair. I guess I can get into that later.

But getting back to Senators Jackson and Anderson, I had even offered to step down from the standpoint of salary to make him feel better. He felt good about that, and that's the way it was going to be. But at the last minute we got into one of those, kind of a tangle, and I felt it was completely unnecessary. As I said, he could be, in his office operation, very difficult at times, demeaning a staffer, in a real sense.

So when I called Scoop back, I had a great sense of relief. Scoop was a regular guy in every sense. You could walk in, converse with him, talk to him about anything, everything, about any time! Until later! [chuckles] And then I'll talk about that! That's when he wanted to become president of the United States. That kind of ambition changes some things.

But, I had a great sense of relief. I really think the only communication I had on that issue of staying was that Senator Jackson offered me a chance to remain as head of the staff of Interior, and I've decided to take it. Having said that, during the year of '63 and '64, Clint Anderson was still virtually running the committee. This was because of one other event that happened relating to Senator Jackson's reelection and the Boeing Company--the development of the SST.

Scoop was just so tied up on that issue, and as you may recall, historically--

RITCHIE: The TFX scandal was going on then, wasn't it?

VERKLER: Yes. That's what they called it at that time. Well, to the extent it was or was not a scandal I don't know, but they had given the contract, I guess, to General Dynamics, wasn't it? And Scoop and others on his Investigations subcommittee wouldn't let it drop, obviously, because of their constituency. He spent lots of time on that. So the first two years that he was chairman, and he was running for reelection in '64, were spent on that issue in Investigations. Clint Anderson continued to be the major domo and chaired most of the meetings and markups.

[laughs] One of the amusing things, I was putting together a record on some issue that was before the committee between them. I'll never forget writing a letter from Scoop to Clint Anderson on the issue, answering it back to Scoop, and signing both letters!

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[laughs] In those days, you know, I could do that. I'm not sure what they do today, but, they were fairly busy. I had an understanding with Senator Jackson that all mail, except from Washington state, I would go ahead and sign his name to it because it was official committee correspondence. I was very humbled by the confidence to let a young fellow do that!

Of course, I had been signing Clint's mail on committee business already for years unless it was some specific policy matter relating to something. I knew when to pass along the right ones. But otherwise, it was kind of a routine thing. I always got a kick out of that---that I wrote both letters and signed both names. And then we had a good file on it! That included vouchers in those days to pay staff expenses for travel and so on.

I was fairly young then. I was a staff director under the age of 30 when I first started there on the committee. In my very late twenties. So it was heady stuff for a young guy from New Mexico. I considered myself a New Mexican then, although I'd only really lived in New Mexico full time six years before I went off into the world, into the Marine Corps. I have spent most of my life running around this Chesapeake Bay area of Washington. So that was very heady stuff, and I'd had a chance to participate in some major issues during this time on the Interior Committee.

RITCHIE: Let's go back just a little bit to when you were in Anderson's personal office. What was the office like? What was the functioning of a senator's office in the 1950's?

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VERKLER: It was very informal. Because New Mexico is the fourth largest state in area--maybe fifth with Alaska, Texas, California, and Montana ahead of it. When I first went there it was fourth, because it was before Alaska statehood. It was a very small state population-wise, so I think that helped us to be much more informal. I think much more informal than it is today, because of the expansion of staff members.

I'm not sure what, for instance, Senator Domenici or Senator [Jeff] Bingaman have in the way of staff members, numbers-wise, but Senator Anderson had twelve to sixteen. As I mentioned to you earlier, when he decided to organize his legislative program along the committees he served on, there were just three of us. One of them, the administrative assistant, was Claude Wood. The press assistant was Doyle Kline. And I think my title then was legislative assistant. I may have been the only one who was listed as a legislative assistant. But it was very informal. He was a hands-on guy as far as the operation, salaries, decision-making. The administrative assistant, who is a very fine gentleman who is still living, Claude Wood, he had the title, but the senator ran the show, with a lot of help from his personal secretary, primarily.

RITCHIE:: Eloise De La O.

VERKLER: Yes. Right. That was the story as far as that goes, but we had a good staff. I don't want to give you a

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wrong impression because they were very good people there. Representing a small state population-wise, he knew an awful, awful lot of the political people personally from his long years behind the scenes and then "in the scenes" as the member of the House and then a member of the Senate.

He enjoyed a very fine reputation as a legislator and as a speaker. He was very funny, and in today's market with the slick thirty-second spot-type campaigning that you do, I don't know if a Clint Anderson could make it or not. I don't think Harry Truman could get elected to the Senate from Missouri today. I don't know for sure. I said recently that some of the current scandal-plagued problems of some of the candidates for the presidential nomination otherwise might bring back the opportunity for the good, old, tough, ugly politicians to make a comeback.

But, in any event, it was a very informal, hard-working staff, because he was a hard-working guy, even with his physical problems and ailments. He was full of energy and ideas, and he was a great guy in that sense. Just a brilliant man.

RITCHIE:: As a legislative aide, what was your relationship with the staff of the Finance Committee?

VERKLER: There was a chief clerk of the Finance Committee.

RITCHIE:: Was it Springer?

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VERKLER: Springer. Elizabeth Springer, and her husband Jim. Never had children. She used to call me her son because I was the young bushy-tailed guy that was always running down there for this or that or working on Senator Anderson's projects. We helped put in the small business corporation in those days to let people organize corporations to have the business advantages of that but to be taxed as if they were partners. That was the innovation in the late fifties. And that was one of the issues I worked on, and all the work on medicare before I went over to the Interior Committee. I was still going to handle that for awhile, but it got to be too much. Then Howard Bray, a very keen, smart fellow who worked for Senator Anderson took over. He'd been a journalist, an intern assigned here. He took over that spot and did probably a much better job than I could ever have done in finally bringing it about.

I like to think my relationship with that committee was very good. Elizabeth Springer came back here with Walter George of Georgia who was the chairman of the Finance Committee. She, too, made the transition. It was somewhat unusual to make the transition from one chairman to another. Most of them obviously want their own people. But, on the other hand, in those days there were smaller staffs. It was not too unusual, in that case, because the Finance Committee did not have a large professional staff. Elizabeth handled the everyday and even the legislative scheduling, but they relied on the staff of the Joint Committee on Taxation and on the Treasury staff when they got into the actual markups.

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In those days, of course, markups were behind closed doors. The "executive" sessions meant just that. In fact [laughs], it may be too early to talk about it now, but I think that that was one of the changes that made the Senate less efficient, in my judgment, than it was back then, as far as the ability to process legislation. In any event, my relationship with Elizabeth Springer and her staff I felt was always very good. I still correspond with her. She's a widow now down in Florida. I very much regret that the times I've been down there I've completely forgotten to look her up. She doesn't live far from Miami, and I'm supposed to go down there again in the spring. I'm going to do that. We still get a Christmas card from her and send them to her. As I said, she used to refer to me as her son. She never had a son, you know; and I was happy about our relationship. Not that she gave me any special consideration. In this business, personal relationships are very helpful as you try to accomplish something. So we got along famously, I felt, and I think she did, too.

As the committee changed, when Senator Byrd passed on or went on and Senator Long actually took over, he started building the staff. Now, there was a good friend of mine, whom Elizabeth brought over even while Senator Byrd was still there. Tom Vail--I don't know if that name rings any bell with you. He was on the Joint Committee staff under the old staff director, Colin Stamm, who was an old fellow who knew every bit of the tax code. Probably helped write most of it. Went around with his shirttail out and so on. But if you wanted to talk about what happened and why it

happened in the code, there were very few people who were as expert as Colin Stamm. And the Finance Committee called on them for technical help. One of the fellows over there was a young fellow named Tom Vail, whom I had met when we were both going to night school. So she brought Tom over to give her some on-site professional help. Of course, he eventually became staff director when Russell became chairman and Elizabeth retired. Whether or not she was urged to go on or not, I'm not real sure. And then a terrible thing happened. Tom developed a tumor--a brain tumor--and died while he was still a young man and still in his early forties, or late thirties. His father had been a professional staffer, I think, in the Congress, maybe on the House side, I never knew him. But we all felt that loss keenly when Tom died as a young man. As you know, one thing led to another; and the staff grew and grew to where it is today. But in those days they got the work done, did a lot of important things. But they just relied on Joint Committee staff to do most of their work and the Treasury, as I say in the actual markups and so on.

RITCHIE: When Finance had markups, it was just for the senators?

VERKLER: Just for the senators and those staff people that were involved in it from the committees. But personal staffs, no. I used to go out in the hall and bring things down to the senator.

But I don't remember, except to go in and give him something, ever sitting in on a markup in the Senate Finance Committee, even on issues that I was most involved with.

New Mexico had a couple of key issues. For some of the senator's old friends, the cabaret tax we were always trying to have modified for these people who ran restaurants, Dubs, and so on. There were other issues involving code changes and so on. But in those days, it was really executive. Except they did let in--and some of us kind of resented it--the assistant Treasury secretary for tax policy, and his staff, taxwriters. Then, of course, the Joint Committee staff would come over and help them provide the technical expertise. They were technical staff.

Even in my own committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, this is what I referred to awhile ago I consider a change for the worse--as we moved into the "sunshine" or participatory democracy, I think we lost a lot of efficiency. In the Interior Committee, which is now Energy and Natural Resources, we used to move from the hearing room where all of the public came and we heard the testimony and discussed legislation and issues, etc., we moved into what is their library--was our library, too--around the large table that the whole committee could get around. And there senators could take off their suit coats. I don't want to oversimplify it, but they could say to each other, even across the aisle--because there were not that many partisan issues then, they were mostly philosophical and regional. Like, regardless of whether you are a Democrat or Republican, if you're trying to get a natural resource

development for your state, a water project, a wilderness area, or whatever, you were on the same side regardless of party. There were an awful lot of regional issues that developed in those days. Northwest versus Southwest when we're talking about water transfers. In fact, I think--to bring us up to date thirty years-- is what helped Tom Foley and others recently defeat the term limitation proposal out in the state of Washington. The fear was of that large monster, California, taking over their water, because they would so far out-number the Northwest members of the House.

But in those days, we marked up our bills in executive session. Today, they mark them up in public before God, the press, and lobbyists like I am and others.

Unfortunately, they don't have the time to go into these private sessions as often as they should to do some of the things we used to do, and make their deals or their understandings, because you are out there in front of everybody. Well, obviously, the great posturing that goes on causes the delay on big issues that are important to a broad range of interests as opposed to, you know, a small park bill in state "A." They can get that done in a hurry.

But we used to be able to go in there and take action. I mentioned earlier Senator Jackson's ambition for the White House. He made two runs for the nomination, as you know--in '72 and '76. Seventy-two was the most serious. We boasted and prided ourselves and had the photographer come in and take a picture as the first, major standing committee to have an open markup. Sunshine was in the air then, so to speak. Openness. And, by golly, let it all out

and so forth, which, as you know, has a part in our democracy. It also, in my judgment, lowers the efficiency as a legislative body.

I think the history of the Senate, particularly, which I'm most familiar with is one of being able to accomplish great things. We know it's the world's most deliberative body, at least from the standpoint of debates on the floor and filibusters, which Senator Anderson, by the way, had a great role in lowering the number required for cloture. When I came here it took 67 senators to cut off debate. Finally got it down to 60. That had to do with the civil rights movement in the 50's.

I'm kind of bouncing back again, but he did develop a pretty good relationship with Richard Nixon, the vice president who was to rule, if it came to that, in favor of cloture, lowering the requirement to 60 percent from 67. On several occasions they made an effort to change Rule 22 of the Senate. Anyway, that was one of my early assignments on his personal staff. We helped do that. We helped work on that issue.

RITCHIE: You mentioned earlier that he admired Richard Russell. But, of course, Richard Russell was the leader on the other side.

VERKLER: Exactly. The old South. Absolutely.

RITCHIE: How did Anderson wind up in the lead on that issue?

VERKLER: Well, that's another thing about whether he considered himself being *outside*. My guess is, because he had actually made a shot at that before I joined him and gotten into it: Senator Anderson was very unique politically. Having been a businessman, there was no question that he understood meeting a payroll, and what it took to launch and run a successful business, or at least initiate it. When he entered political life he wasn't actively managing his business. But he was also, as a good Democrat, a leader of labor-supported efforts like Medicare and others. He could walk on both sides of a lot of philosophical issues, and groups, too. He was the leader on the Wilderness bill. The effort to preserve wilderness. By the same token, he had an understanding of the needs of the oil and gas industry which is important in his state and the nation. But, still, he got into the forefront of those kinds of battles on his committee and elsewhere. This was before I came, but one of the great, significant battles in natural resources in our history, I think, was the Tidelands battle that occurred. I mentioned that Senator Long had gotten on Interior and others had for that battle. The great battle was whether the state from the mean, low tide out would own everything. President Truman vetoed a bill that had passed to give them title to that. The final compromise was three miles out except off Texas where they got ten leagues--about nine miles, I think. Or nine leagues. [laughs] Ten miles, whatever, and off the west coast of Florida, where now they won't let us look for

anything. This is another issue that bothers me from a national standpoint. Senator Anderson was in the forefront of protecting the interior states. Of course, New Mexico was not a coastal state! But Washington was. Scoop Jackson was on his side on that issue. I don't know how he would have taken it if there had been a lot of oil found there, if they ever looked. I'm not sure. Now we don't have much of a chance to look in those areas, and, as we become more and more dependent on foreign sources for our petroleum.

He was also the author--the primary author--of the Wilderness bill. He got sick, whether the gall bladder or some other illness and Frank Church had to do the floor battle for him. Actually, it was after Scoop Jackson became chairman during that big surge of '64 and '65 when we passed an awful lot. That's why my admiration, frankly, for Lyndon Johnson is very high. Kennedy and the Camelot crowd, I admired, that is one of the great tragedies in our history, what happened to him. They had some good ideas which were given to them by the people supporting more conservation--expansion of our national parks, wilderness, etc. Just like Medicare and other issues. But they never got them through. They never really did! And if there is one thing that's true about Lyndon Johnson, it was that he could legislate; and he could get the job done [chuckles] And did! I never knew Senator Johnson on a real personal basis. I've got several pictures of his autographed to me when we passed bills. He used to do that. He used to have a lot of bill-signings.

Having been a staffer himself before he was elected to Congress, I think he realized the importance of the congressional staff in getting things done. But there are a couple of things I would like to mention there.

I never really knew the majority leader as such. One of my proud moments in my life--and I kid about it now. I say, "He used to ask my advice." Well, that may not be really accurate. One time he came up to me on the floor when I was standing near Senator Anderson's desk and said, "Where's Clint?" That's the only advice that he ever asked me for! And I was thrilled to death that he associated me with Clint Anderson! Obviously being a staffer in those days, you're on the floor and off the floor. He recognized that I was part of Anderson's entourage there. I was very pleased that he had asked me for that advice. And I think I gave it to him! [laughs] He was out in the cloakroom somewhere.

I remember also saying after I became staff director of the Interior Committee and had been in Washington a total of about eight years, I said, "Well, I've been down to the White House three times in the last ten days. And three times in the last eight years." The same three times! Because we had signed several bills--or Johnson had had a big barbecue out there and had invited staffers and all that sort of thing. I know that history is going to record him because he didn't want to be the first president to maybe lose a war as he carried on the policy of preventing the "domino theory" from working in Southeast Asia. That was a losing proposition. I know we all regret how it did turn out. No one

seems to really regret the fact that we prevented Korea from going under the communist bloc which they probably would have if President Truman didn't take the lead under the United Nations to stop it! We had a limited objective there of not letting them cross that line as opposed to victory over them which would have triggered--and did trigger--the Chinese coming in when we did go above the Yalu river.

But in those days, Americans were not happy over limited objectives, apparently. Even though the British had done it for a century in preserving their empire. This recent Desert Storm and Desert Shield exercise proved that we are able to go out--and, luckily for all of us, just like Grenada, and Panama, and achieve limited objectives. But they went over and proved that we could do it and win even though people now are saying, "Wait a minute. What did we win?" He's still in power, and we're in a lot of difficulty, but we did kick them out of Kuwait. In any event, Johnson will be forever remembered for Vietnam escalation. In my judgment, he ought to be remembered as one of the great presidents for preserving our resources, signing into law the Wilderness bill and the Water Conservation Fund, the greatest expansion in the history of the national park system as well as Medicare and other programs designed to help our society, especially those less fortunate from a social standpoint than the majority.

Mr. Caro and others have painted this critical picture of him. Lord knows, he was a tough master. He might be guilty of a lot of character defects that a lot of people would be shocked at. But

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they're not many people, in my judgment, that could come out of the rural hill country of Texas like he did and accomplish what all he did without all that driving and talented ability to get things done and mobilize. Sure, if you want to dwell on the dark side of his character, everybody knew about that! I venture to say that you could probably find that on almost anybody who had accomplished what he did, to get where he did. But he was a person who was a master of the legislative process as we pushed those programs through. He put his mark on them, and was able to do it!

Kennedy was glamour. Sure, it was kind of an exciting new era. More and more we became enamored with him and hung on Jackie's every word. And that was great! A new beginning and so on. But when you get right down to measuring what was really done, it hadn't worked. As you know, Barry Goldwater had really started campaigning hard for the presidency and was the conservatives' choice in '64. There was no doubt in my mind that President Kennedy would have been reelected overwhelming also. I mean, there is always a little lingering doubt, and no one was real certain that he would because of his close, close election in 1960 over Nixon. But having proved that a Catholic could win and being personally popular, like he was growing every day--and glamour--the press loved him because of his charm, I think he would have been reelected.

But, of course, with his assassination and Lyndon Johnson carrying every state except Arizona. Oh, no.

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RITCHIE: The deep South states.

VERKLER: Five of them, wasn't it?

RITCHIE: Yeah. Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia.

VERKLER: Did he carry Arizona?

RITCHIE: Goldwater carried Arizona.

VERKLER: Yeah. He did carry his home state. That was right.

RITCHIE: That was the only state outside of the deep South.

VERKLER: And there were just four or five. And that was back in the days when civil rights was in vogue, and the deep South was gasping and struggling to prevent what has finally transpired with the march of history.

Anyway, I think Kennedy would have won. But it might have been much, much closer than we think. But Johnson won and accomplished a great deal. As part of the staff in those days, we participated in a lot of these efforts. I worked very closely with Stewart Udall and his people when he was Secretary of the Interior during the whole period of the Kennedy-Johnson years. All eight years. In fact, near the end of his term, with a couple of years to go, he offered me an opportunity to take his top assistant's

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place. Orren Beatty left. Orren subsequently tried to run for Congress himself from the old district, or out in the state. It wasn't the old district, because Mo Udall had Stewart's district. He offered me that chance. But I thought better of it and decided not to go down there and stay where I was.

We did a lot, and accomplished a lot in the resource field. And Senator Anderson was a leader in those battles. But how he got into the leadership role? I think he was asked to be by the ones who were fighting that most, the pro-civil rights types. Labor and others. He took that cudgel upon himself and led the battle.

RITCHIE: What's unusual is that some of the southwestern senators wouldn't vote for cloture. People like Carl Hayden. They said it protected small states. And they seemed to have a sort of a quid pro quo with some of the southern senators that: we'll vote for you on civil rights if you vote with us on oil and gas. But Anderson broke out of that mold and fought the battle on cloture.

VERKLER: Yes he did. And I remember another book which Senator Anderson wrote, or had a chapter in it, called *New Mexico, Almost Arizona*. Because Carl Hayden told him something that happened about back when Carl was sheriff of Maricopa County. You know, he was a real joy that Carl Hayden, as it was for me, for a young man to be with him. As an aside here about that library where we held our mark-ups. You know, when Barry Goldwater ran for president and left the Senate, why Carl came over to the committee.

Here he was the most senior member of the Senate, but he came over to help get the Central Arizona Project authorized since Barry had left the committee. And they worked very closely together.

He came over on the committee as a new member. [chuckles] But we treated him with a lot more deference than an ordinary new member of the committee. But I remember in that library we had some pictures of former members of the committee from about the turn of the century and the early teens and twenties. I don't even know if the committee still has them. They were from various and sundry states of the West because it was primarily a western committee. I was showing him that one day, and here he was almost ninety at the time. Very late eighties. [dramatizes his voice] "Oh I remember that old fella." [laughs]

I used to kid about him because in those days we worked on Saturday mornings. We were lucky if we got off on Saturday mornings. We used to kid about it that on Saturday I'd be sitting in my office, there, and I would get a call personally from Senator Carl Hayden asking about some issue. What he probably was doing was coming in and fouling up his staff by meddling in the mail and stuff, and he was getting letters from outside Arizona. And he'd call me. And then we used to see him take a couple of the young ladies from his office to lunch on Saturday. And we'd say, "There is Senator Hayden taking those young girls to lunch. But he can't remember what for!" [laughs]

He was a remarkable guy! And he's a guy who taught me one day during a hearing by saying--and I've used it ever since, borrowed

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from him--in the context of somebody testifying for trying to get a project, trying to get something. He said, "Gratitude in a political sense was a lively anticipation of favors yet to come." That's the first time I'd ever heard that, and I don't remember having heard it since except when I've used it. But in the political process, that is how you define gratitude.

RITCHIE: How was New Mexico "almost Arizona?"

VERKLER: Okay. Yes. I'm sorry. I'll get back to that. Senator Anderson came to me during one of the debates on Rule 22, and he said, "Carl Hayden said something to me about if it hadn't been for the ability to filibuster, New Mexico would be part of Arizona today." I had to look this up, and I had forgotten exactly--frankly it's been quite a while, but as you recall, I believe it was in 1906 when Oklahoma and the Indian Territory came in as one state, Oklahoma. And then part of the deal was that New Mexico and Arizona would come in as one state. Those two territories would come in as one state. [chuckles] There was some jockeying going on. I think New Mexico was pushing this. This was in 1906. They would be called Arizona, but the capital would be in Santa Fe. People in Arizona weren't too trustful of their politically-oriented neighbors from New Mexico, and they fought it like heck. Apparently, the threat of a filibuster kept that from happening! And then, of course, it took another six years before both states came in separately.

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I'm not a historian. I'd like to know more about it. I've got that article somewhere. When I say article--I may have just done a memo on that issue, and that's been over thirty years ago. But Senator Hayden told him not to be too anxious to do that because it had an impact on his state. And we looked that up, and I do have a copy of that memo somewhere in my files that I've saved. I'll have to dig that out.

RITCHIE: Hayden made a point of never voting for cloture. Even at the very end of the '64 civil rights bill, he sort of hung back in the cloakroom. He would vote for cloture if they needed it. But not otherwise.

VERKLER: Right. Well, it was a matter of principle. And, again, getting back to Richard Russell and all of those strong, deep South votes. It was a battle that they fought that was left over from previous days.

RITCHIE: But Anderson's leading that fight didn't disrupt his relationship with Russell? Senator Russell?

VERKLER: Well, I don't think it disrupted his personal relationship, because, you know, they were all friends. [chuckles] And I never forget a story told to me by Tommy Kuchel--Thomas Kuchel of California, who took Earl Warren's seat. Oh, I'm sorry. Earl Warren appointed him to this seat in California.

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RITCHIE:: Took Richard Nixon's seat.

VERKLER: Took Nixon's seat. And then was subsequently elected in his own right two or three times. But Kuchel was a remarkable guy whom I was very fond of. He was, what I would call, out of the Hiram Johnson, progressive California politics. He was a Republican, but you will recall, when he was finally defeated, he lost the nomination because some Republicans wanted to scold him or teach him a little lesson! It turned out that they lost their seat there. California was a funny state during the period of the fifties and sixties because during that period it passed New York as the heaviest populated state. And yet they were throwing their senators out before they really had a chance.

Clair Engle was chairman of the House Interior and Insular Affairs Committee. He worked his way up. He gave that up to successfully run for the Senate and start over again. and then he died after a term or so in the Senate. I don't know how long he would have lasted. But Tom Kuchel was the other senator from California. Eventually he became the ranking member of the Senate Interior and Insular Affairs Committee, and then they defeated him in his own primary.

I started to make a point that Kuchel told me something. Forgot now where I was on that! [laughs] That's the danger of rambling sometimes.

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RITCHIE:: We were talking about cloture and about the relation to that and Anderson's personal relations to Russell.

VERKLER: Right. Something slipped there in my memory. I was getting ready to make a point about Tom or something he'd said. Can't quite bring it up in the computer right now.

RITCHIE:: Also, going back to the '50s when you were still in Anderson's office, what was Anderson's relationship with Dennis Chavez, the other senator from New Mexico.

VERKLER: Chavez only lived for six years after I came to the Senate, as I mentioned before. Their relationship was always frosty. There was a lack of personal amity. I don't want to say respect. Maybe lack respect is too strong. But Chavez very zealously guarded his title as the senior senator and kind of resented Clint Anderson. You know, he was a fellow who had been around politically for a long time. He was from Los Chavez which is between Albuquerque and Belen, New Mexico--south of Albuquerque--and worked his way up politically. But he was always fighting with what I might say was the mainstream of the Democratic Party of New Mexico. I guess they were always fighting with him, too, or wanted to defeat him. I know he had a blood feud with a lot of those people, and they found a way to get rid of him back when we had only one congressman, the seat to which he was elected. They got him to run for the Senate in 1934 against Bronson Cutting who

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was a maverick-type Republican in the La Follette tradition. In fact, I think he was from New York, if I'm not mistaken. But he was a friend of the La Follettes, and he was in that category.

Cutting defeated him, as you know as a historian, in 1934. Then before he was sworn in for another term he died in an airplane crash out there. So they had persuaded Dennis Chavez to take him on, and I think a lot of people thought they were finally going to get rid of him. But then Chavez put the pressure on the new governor, Clyde Tingley, who also had a long history out there in New Mexico and was the governor and former mayor of Albuquerque. So he did appoint Dennis, and Dennis had a tough race most every time afterwards except one. The big one was with Patrick Hurley where there was a large dispute over the vote count. That's where a handful of Republicans in the Senate did support Dennis. One of them was the newly appointed senator, Thomas Kuchel, helping Dennis Chavez. Chavez never forgot it, and I'm sure that most of that large Spanish population in Southern California never forgot it! Kuchel never gave them a chance to forget it. But Clint Anderson went to bat for him. Of course, Hurley was also his first opponent in '48. Clint defeated him. Then in '52 when Chavez sought reelection, it drug on and on--the Senate finally had to settle it. In '58, I think, Senator Chavez was reelected very easily. But he had tough races all the way through--kind of close races. He and Clint would usually end up fighting over who would be the governor. One of the bright young guys who was elected governor, a Clinton Anderson protege more or less, or

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out of his wing, was John Simms. Why the Chavez people just fought him tooth and nail because they saw him as running for the Senate when his governor's term was up! They in fact defeated him in his reelection bid by helping elect the first Republican governor out there in years and years, Ed Meacham.

I think that was back in 1950, because I think Sims--oh, wait a minute. Maybe Simms was elected in '54 and defeated in '56, and Chavez was going to be up in '58. Whatever it was, it was decided to get rid of him so he wouldn't be a challenge to the Senator. My dates may be a little off.

Senator Anderson helped Senator Chavez. That was the thing to do. You know, your colleague, same party. You're going to help him in all those debates. I don't think Senator Anderson was at fault for a lot of the friction although he was a very proud guy and sensitive. He had his ego that was a mile high, too! And the Chavez folks had theirs' in that sense, such little petty things as who controlled the state society in Washington. You know, when you have a small populated state like New Mexico these things become bigger and more prestigious.

But Senator Anderson served his time as the junior senator. That kind of galled him, and Senator Chavez had--it's a matter of fact--a big, big problem with alcohol. Also his son, Dennis Jr., did. But, yet, the people kept electing him. Except maybe that one time [chuckles], but they counted him in anyway. They settled it, as I started to mention, a handful of senators voted to seat

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Dennis. And one of them was Senator Kuchel of California. I think Margaret Chase Smith voted for him then, too.

They did not get along smoothly. Most of the time I would call it very frosty, but an armed truce.

RITCHIE: I've often heard that the most difficult relationship is between two senators from the same party from the same state.

VERKLER: That's right. I think historically that's true when they are trying to get a one upmanship on being able to announce some project or take a little credit. If one is stronger than the other politically, has more support, it becomes a problem for the lesser one who is struggling. They generally lend each other support, though; because, no matter how you disagree--or I found it in those days, or even today--I'm sure, you've got people with diverse regional interests of one party. Like Bennett Johnston chairing the Senate Energy Committee today. When I was there he was a freshman his first two years--my last two years. Yet, a majority of his party was against this energy bill that's now pending. For different reasons. I strongly supported Senator Johnston's view, obviously being in the energy business feeling that we needed a policy. Sometimes you don't want legislation to pass. But in this time, having sent 500,000 young people to the Middle East and energy was the underlying reason we were there. As well as Kuwait's independence, we had to keep Saddam Hussein from

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controlling the gulf oil in the Middle East. If he had succeeded in taking over Kuwait, even if he didn't physically move into Saudi Arabia, he would have controlled the outcome. So I think Johnston was correct, bouncing all the way up here in 1991 and '92, but a majority of his party was against it.

And yet, they band together for control both for each other and for organizational purposes. There is a strong tie that binds. Back in the old days--I say the old days--generally, the southerners voted with the conservative view of the Republicans most of the time on most issues. That changes somewhat. Depends on who they are. You have a very conservative senator from Florida, and you have Senator Graham, a Democrat from Florida. Well, back in the early days, Spessard Holland was very conservative. Of course, I was going to use that as an example, but then George Smathers was kind of conservative. He defeated a liberal, Senator [Claude] Pepper who later became "Congressman" Pepper for years and years. Pepper was a New Dealer and from Florida which--is it southern? Is it urban? I mean, it's more urban than it is southern. Even though they did elect Connie Mack, a very conservative guy, I don't think you'd call Senator Graham real conservative on most issues. But, generally, they band together on issues that are popular in their state.

But in those days, the South was pretty united. The "Solid South" of history.

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RITCHIE:: Speaking of the South, reminds me of the ceremony for Senator Chavez's centennial. Senator Stennis spoke in front of Chavez's statue, and recalled how Chavez invited him to New Mexico to campaign for his reelection. After they had traveled together for a few days, Chavez said, "You can go home now, John." Stennis said, "Why don't you need me any more?" Chavez replied, "Because we are leaving the "Little Dixie" part of New Mexico."

VERKLER: That's right. Eastern New Mexico and southeastern New Mexico was an extension of west Texas, and they called that Little Dixie. It is a diverse state. You'll notice New Mexico--the eastern boundary comes down to a square and then cuts across over to the middle of the state. And there's El Paso, Texas. Those Texans jimmied us out of about a third of the state because that line should have gone all the way down to the river and old Mexico at that point. But it didn't. I was in El Paso last week on some business. All of the news and most of the coverage relates to things going on in New Mexico. Las Cruces is just above El Paso. There is as much New Mexico news coverage as there is from the rest of Texas, it seems to me.

Yes, and then when you get up the Rio grande Valley, why it's more of the Spanish influence. Albuquerque, Bernalillo County, has developed into the major population center. They have--used to at least--have a third of the population in the state right there.

[End of Interview #1]

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