

F. Nordy Hoffmann

Senate Sergeant at Arms, 1975-1981

Interview #4

Senate Democratic Campaign Committee

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Interviewed by Donald A. Ritchie

RITCHIE: We talked previously about your work on the Kennedy campaign in 1960, and his election. I wanted to talk today about the 1960s, when Kennedy and Johnson were in the White House. You were a labor lobbyist in the 1950s when Eisenhower was President, now you were working under a Democratic administration. Did your tactics change when Kennedy became President? Did the strategies perhaps change?

HOFFMANN: We had a more open door policy than we had before. Not all of us, because we did have some contacts earlier, going back to the time of Truman. We built some bridges--I use the word bridges as a conveyance, to get across--with Hill people who then went into the Eisenhower Administration and did a job for us in the White House. Maxwell Raab was one of them. He was a very, very great friend. He was Lodge's Administrative Assistant, and he and I had become very great friends over the years. Maxwell is now Ambassador to Rome.

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But there was more openness as far as the Kennedy Administration was concerned. Even though we had these other keys before, it was like the door wasn't lock now and we could walk through on occasions. I think, by and large, that was the picture. At least we had a chance to submit the things we were seeking, and to argue our case. I think it was much better than it was before.

RITCHIE: The counsel to your union was now Secretary of Labor.

HOFFMANN: That's right, Arthur Goldberg.

RITCHIE: That's a sign of your closeness to the Administration.

HOFFMANN: That's right.

RITCHIE: But in that period from 1961 to 1963, Kennedy's legislative program really didn't get off the ground.

HOFFMANN: No, it didn't.

RITCHIE: Do you have any feelings about why things didn't take off?

HOFFMANN: It's pretty hard to make a specific call on that. As I remember now, we were taking a fairly positive way of trying to move the legislation through that we were particularly interested in. I don't think we lost any ground in this, but I do think that it took time for the new Administration to put its feet on the ground and be recognized in what they were trying to do. In most of those things that particularly concerned us, I went back to an old friend any time I had to, Bobby Kennedy, and got his ear, and tried to find out what we could do, because he and I had worked together on many things over the years. So I do think we were moving it. I don't think it moved as fast, but why it didn't move as fast, I don't know, because Kennedy had the greatest tactician in the world in Lyndon Johnson, as far as the Hill was concerned.

However, you've got to remember that all that glitters is not gold. There were some meaningful disaffections within the Administration itself, without naming any names. I think truthfully that was one of the things that made it drag along. I know it didn't move as fast as Bobby wanted to move, and I'm damn sure it didn't move as fast as the President wanted to move. Lyndon came into prominence when it came to moving things on the Hill, because he knew the Hill better than anybody in the world. He had moved the Hill before. So we worked greatly with him as a person to at least advise us on what direction they were going to

go, so that we wouldn't get caught off base. And we didn't, thanks to him. But it was a slow process, a very slow process. In fact, the process speeded up unbelievably when Lyndon Johnson became President.

RITCHIE: In the Kennedy period, the event that stands out isn't a piece of legislation so much as it's Kennedy's clash with the Steel Industry in '62. The President had been active in keeping unions from asking for wage increases, and then trying to keep the companies from seeking price increases. Were you involved in that?

HOFFMANN: Oh, yes, we were involved in the whole thing, all the way down. This was the legislative arm down here, and we were doing exactly what the leadership felt we ought to be doing. Obviously, we had friends in there; Arthur Goldberg was a particular friend, and he had been in on the negotiations of all these things so far as we were concerned. We had some real tough examinations of conscience when it came to dealing with the White House on steel and holding the line on prices. They wanted us to hold the line on wages, and then they wanted to go ahead and raise their prices. It didn't work, at least ostensibly it didn't work, it may have worked in some small cases, but not totally. We were

probably more well-informed than we had been before as to what course they were going to take. He was very open about the questions that were raised with him, as far as the labor unions were concerned.

RITCHIE: I never could figure out what motivated the steel industry to push for a price increase at that time.

HOFFMANN: I don't know. I don't have any real insight into that, because that was coming from the other side of the field. We thought it was very strange that they would try to do it. I don't know whether they thought they could get to Kennedy through the Kennedy family, in some way, to talk to him about this, but it wasn't going to work, because it was pretty obvious to the President that the people who had really been behind his getting elected had been the rank and file of the Steelworkers. He was not going to deny them their day in the sun and give it to the Steel Industry, who certainly had opposed Kennedy in his election.

RITCHIE: In retrospect, the Steel Industry has been on the decline ever since then.

HOFFMANN: Yes, it has.

RITCHIE: That was almost its high water mark at that point.

HOFFMANN: That's right. Well, if you really want to examine that, a lot of that was due to the Steel Industry's failure to plow back into the industry the necessary changes in plant operations. In other words, bring them up to the twentieth century. They felt it was going to go along just as it was. We were giving a lot of our information away to foreign countries, on how to make a steel industry. They were going out and building brand-new plants. We were using plants that had been through the mill for a long time. It was pretty difficult to understand how we thought we could compete with them with their modern plants, and our plants had not been modernized. That was the real problem. That was the beginning of why the Steel Industry went down--the lack of modernization in the steel plants themselves.

We were using old methods, and we were giving to the "enemy" outside the United States the best operation that we could think of as to how to run a steel mill. And it just didn't work that way. We were in second place. You can't give somebody a brand new mill and try to compete with them, I don't care who you are. Just nobody is that smart. Therefore it began to decline, and we recognized that. Today, look at the steel mill. I hate to even think of it. It isn't anything like it was in the days when we began. A lot of it was due to the fact that they had decided that they were not going to modernize their plants, which was a mistake.

We tried, Joe Scanlon and I tried, we went all over the United States. We were down in Alabama, we were up in Pennsylvania. The only new plant that was built at that time was a Fairless Works, right out of Philadelphia, in Fairless, PA. Fairless Works was one of the bright spots, but if you build a plant in one area and the rest of the mills are deteriorating, the deterioration is going to cause you to lay off people. It's going to cause unemployment. Then there is no idea of buying--and the building industry was not doing as well right then as it had been before. So yes, it was deteriorating, and it was due basically to lack of capital put in to modernize our own steel mills.

RITCHIE: Another incident in the Kennedy era that you had a long interest in was the Clean Water Act. Ed Muskie chaired the subcommittee hearings on that bill. Was that one of your main priorities at that stage?

HOFFMANN: It wasn't the main priority, because we were concerned about the deterioration of the steel industry. But clean water was an off-shoot of it. We began to see the rivers and tributaries all being blocked with junk out of coal mines, or steel mills, or chemical plants, and we wanted to do something to stop that. At that particular time I went up to the Army War College in Carlisle, and while I was there, three or four of us went out to look at the stream which goes through Carlisle--I'm not sure what the name of it was--and there were huge amounts of

phosphorous, it looked like foam, coming to the head of these streams. It was from illegal dumping into those streams. That was a long time ago, and now we're paying for it.

Look what we're doing today: we're dumping in the ocean. I never heard of anybody dumping in the ocean, or Puget Sound, or any place else. That was verboten when I was raised as a kid. I don't know why they suddenly think they can get away with it, but they are certainly causing us real problems. I think now they are going to find that these people who have invested a lot of money in beach areas are going to start carrying the load to clean this up and cut it out. I don't understand the philosophy of dumping a hundred miles out when the tides are coming in. That's stupid. It just gives it a good wash all the way in.

We were worried about streams. We had a lot of people who worked in the steel mills who were fishermen, and they brought it to our attention. Why aren't we doing something about this? Why can't we get our streams cleared up, so that the fishing, and the lakes and the streams would be much better off? You take a look at a place like Minnesota, figure out how many lakes you've got in Minnesota, and in Wisconsin, and here's a big part of the steel mills. We're getting all our iron ore out of Minnesota, and putting it on barges and ships and taking it over and

dumping it in Cleveland and running it on trains to Pittsburgh, or Philadelphia, or where else you want it. By and large, those

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people up in that area, who didn't have all the amenities that we have in these big cities, were very much interested in the land, in the environment, and how to keep it. Slowly you could find out that these fish were dying in the river. So we began to do a real job on that.

We started that, really, in the late '50s. I think it was 1958 when we really began to work on this, and we made a film which we used to bring this to the attention of, not only our membership, but everybody else we could get to look at this picture. President I.W. Abel said one time, "The only trouble was you were twenty years ahead of your time." That may have been, but at least we had tried to start it. But you've got to remember when you talk about the improvement of the water, one of the first men that I remember who concerned himself about this was the Senator from Oregon, Wayne Morse, who said "We are wasting water." He began it, and Ed Muskie, coming from Maine, had the same problems up there that we were having in areas of Minnesota. It began to be just like a snowball, it got bigger as it rolled down the pike.

I think that many of the senators who were concerned about clean and pure water probably had a lot more foresight than we gave them credit for at the time. People said, "Oh, they're just environmentalists," you know, "do-gooders." Well, that wasn't really true. They were saying that we've got millions of people

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in this land and they depend on water to survive. The first thing we'll know we're not going to have any water, and we will have no survival, we will have no nation, period, that's the way it's going to go. Anyway, that's why we took a very strong position about it, in the Steelworkers Union.

I went around to most of the district meetings in that time, and this was a main topic. If you made a speech, the questions that came at that particular time were so overwhelmingly on clean air and clean water, it was unbelievable. That was brought up more than anything else. We used to keep track of it then, and it was by far one of the biggest issues we had.

RITCHIE: Well, it certainly pushed Muskie to the forefront.

HOFFMANN: No question about it.

RITCHIE: He was a junior senator in his first term, chairing a subcommittee, and taking on this major issue, and accomplishing something.

HOFFMANN: And it was a major issue. A lot of people were saying "Do gooder," "do gooder," well that wasn't it. He was concerned about it just as much as anybody else. He was also a

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fisherman, and he saw what was happening in his own State of Maine. Then he began getting people like myself and others who were saying to him: "Look, Ed, this is a big topic. There's an awful lot of people who are interested in this, nationwide." He said, "Well, we've got to do something about it." So he began to do a very, very constructive job, and he made a great contribution. Except that those contributions had to be followed by something, and other people did not follow in the same latitude that he did.

RITCHIE: What type of person was Muskie to work with?

HOFFMANN: Well, I think really the best person in the world to talk about Muskie is sitting out in my front office, my wife. She came down from Maine with Muskie when he came down in '59. She was the first one in the office. She always spoke very highly of him, that he was a good man to work for. They were very close friends; we still are close friends with the Muskies. Joanne found that working with Muskie, he was a perfectionist, and he exacted perfection out of people that he worked with.

We became very close, Muskie and I, largely due to the fact that when he came down here he opposed some of the things that Lyndon Johnson wanted, which therefore made it very, very difficult for him to get much space in the Senate. He was being kind of hogtied. Joanne used to call me and say, "Ed needs to go

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to lunch." So Ed Muskie, and Pat McNamara and I would have lunch in the Senate dining room, maybe two or three times a month, just to talk. He was a man who was seeking information. He wanted to know how things worked, and where they were working.

He was particularly interested in what was happening in the labor movement nationally. But he had certain things like clean air and clean water, and later, as you know, he became interested in the budget--to constrain the budget. He took those positions; he was not forced into them; he believed that we ought to address ourselves to those conditions because they were going to cause us problems. Did they cause us problems? What is the budget today? Where are we? Aren't we dealing with borrowed money all the time? That's what he was concerned about back in 1959. He was right then, and he's still right. The budgetary process, although it slowed down, suddenly went to pot when Reagan came in and it went crazy, and we were overspending everything that we did. Not like Reagan says, by the Congress, but what he did in the military and other

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budgets, and giving help to other nations, which we don't question maybe needed the help, but nevertheless which cut in and cost us more money as we went along. We were not living within our income, and that bothered Muskie. He was a very fine guy to work for. A very honest man, very direct. He made no haphazard decisions. Mansfield told me one time that he was one of the most thoughtful senators on the Senate

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floor. He thought very carefully before he spoke on anything, and he researched it before he spoke on it. So you always knew that he wasn't grabbing something that was flying by on the tail of the kite, but something which had good meaning and a good possibility of changing something way down the road. He had a lot of unbelievable ideals, which he always kept. I found him to be one of the great guys to work with. He was an outgoing sort of a fellow, if you knew him. But if you didn't know him, he was a Maine person. Not a mean person, but a Maine person. A Maine person is one who keeps his own counsel and is not very outgoing. But Muskie was, he had an outgoing personality. He knew the Senate, and he worked hard at it.

So looking in perspective, this was a great crew of people who came in '58, a lot of good guys. Ronald Reagan at that time was a Democrat. He now is a Republican and now condemns all of these people because they are liberals. Well, history will tell whether he's right or whether he's wrong. He puts the tag on them, but it seems to me that you'll find out that he was the guy who negotiated the contracts for the Screen Actors' Guild in those days, and he was fairly liberal himself. Of course, now he's to the right of Attila the Hun. We must bear with it until he exoduses from the White House.

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RITCHIE: When we're discussing Muskie, it's hard to remember now that when he came to the Senate in 1959, he took an anti-Johnson position, and instead of going along bucked the system, and instead of getting Foreign Relations got Public Works and the District of Columbia. What kind of advice did you give to him then? How did you try to help him deal with all this?

HOFFMANN: On these things, you couldn't advise him. On these things he felt very deeply. He felt that it was the wrong way to go just to go along. He took that hard line. Joanne used to kid, she'd say, "Poor Ed, he needs somebody to talk to." It was tough, very tough. He's a man of principle, always has been, far above anything else. If that's the way they took after him, fine and dandy, that's the way it would be. In the long run he felt he could work it out, and did. But it was tough, I want to tell you. When he first took the opposition to the leadership when he came in here, it was no holds barred, because those were the days when the leader was the controller, and if you didn't go along with the controller you didn't eat at the breakfast table, period.

RITCHIE: He reminds me a little of Hubert Humphrey when he first came. Humphrey started out as an outsider in the Senate, shunned by the establishment and shunted aside, but eventually became a real insider in the Senate. Muskie got that treatment as well. Did the men change, or did the institution change?

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HOFFMANN: The institution, I think, changed a lot. I really do. It changed gradually. If you were there you could see it changing, but people on the outside didn't see it change. They felt it was just somebody going along. Well, it wasn't going along. You trace Hubert and his actions then, when LBJ was the majority leader, and let's go down when Hubert was running for the presidency. Did LBJ come out and help him? The answer is no. I don't know whether that went back to that particular thing, but I don't think that history will ever say that LBJ got over a grudge very easily. It took a lot of nurturing to get him over there. I think that that was in the back of his mind when he didn't help Humphrey any more than he did. But of course there were others that didn't help him either. There was Gene McCarthy, who was supposed to be his great friend, but he didn't help him. He walked away. The only guy who really stuck with Hubert was Big Ed, and Ed believed that Hubert was right. There you see the character that was in the two men, and they tried hard. They might have made a change in the country if they had won, but it was not to be, therefore we had to go along with what we were given by the voters, which is the right way to go, I can't argue with that.

RITCHIE: One other person in that period I wanted to ask you about was Mike Mansfield, who took over from Johnson in 1961, but a very different character as majority leader.

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HOFFMANN: He was. He was a let-the-Senate-do-it-if-they-want-to man. I always remember him, and this goes way back to when he was in the House. His wife and my sister went to St. Mary's, across from Notre Dame. I went in to see Mike one time when he was in the House of Representatives and I was representing the Steelworkers. I said, "Congressman, I'm here in behalf of the Steelworkers, and I'd appreciate it if you would say a word or two about what we're trying to do." He looked at me and he said, "I will neither talk for you or against you, but I will always vote with you." That was his motto. He was a man of very few words, as you know. Anybody who knew Mike, knew Mike was not a guy who would make a lot of noise. He loved the Senate, he really did. He worked hard at it. He, again, was close to Muskie, and he was close to Humphrey. That was particularly interesting if you're going to go back and look at the historical significance of that time in the Senate. He was close to those people. He liked Humphrey. He liked Ed Muskie. I mean, he admired both of them, and encouraged them to talk to him and advise him on things. Ed was very, very fond of Mike, and still is. Hubert was also. He liked Mike Mansfield and felt he was a good leader.

Mike Mansfield's idea of leading was exactly the opposite of Lyndon Johnson's. Lyndon Johnson was a forceful guy who pushed for what he thought he wanted to do. Mike Mansfield said, "If this is what we're going to do, I'm going to present it to the

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senators and they're going to make up their own minds." That's the way he governed it. I think that's why it looked like he wasn't doing anything, because he followed a guy who was so forceful. His idea was not being cute, it was that these men were all elected in the various parts of the country, and to try to push them someplace was the wrong way to do it. He's a Westerner, and they don't believe in doing that in the West. What he did was say okay, here's the problem, you make your decisions and that's the way we'll go. It was an attempt, I think by the majority leader, to move by acclamation rather than by direction.

RITCHIE: Did you think that some of that style, however, was responsible for the slowness of the pace in the Senate. . . .

HOFFMANN: Oh, yes, no question about it.

RITCHIE: And the reason why things weren't getting done at that stage.

HOFFMANN: There was no question about it, absolutely. It was a slowness, but that was Mike Mansfield. Mike Mansfield was not a pusher. Mike Mansfield was a persuader. People had to think about it themselves. Where Lyndon was a pusher. He just said, this is what it's going to be, and he lined up the votes and that's what it was. It's a different style. Maybe the Senate suffered from that style, but not too long. What happened later on? When Lyndon became Vice President he went right back to

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saying, "Mike, you run the Senate." And what did he do? He then began to push for civil rights and the things he could do. He helped Mike put through the Civil Rights Act, which I thought was a major turning point for a guy from the South, and a very great thing that Lyndon Johnson did.

I remember the day after Kennedy was nominated, and we had a meeting the day after, at the convention. I went to Lyndon and said, "Who is going to be the majority leader?" He said, "There's only one: Mike Mansfield. He will be a great majority leader." That was his own quote to me. You can make the comparisons, but they're so obvious to make. Here's a guy who tries to persuade, and here's a guy who's going to push and not persuade. "This is what it's going to be, and there ain't going to be any changes" versus "This is what we'd like to have it be, but how do you feel about it?"

RITCHIE: Still, I think it must have been difficult to go back and to tell someone like I.W. Abel or George Meany that things were just going very slowly and that legislation they were hoping to pass, everything from Medicare to Right to Work, was still sitting in committee, and things weren't generating. Wasn't there some sort of frustration on the part of labor now that they had gotten a Democratic administration in, and wanted to get things done, and here's the Senate going at this slow pace?

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HOFFMANN: No, I don't think so. At least I never felt that. I never had that kind of pressure from Abe and those people. They wanted to get things done, and it was difficult, but we understood why, because there was a different temperament of men. I.W. Abel was a great leader, but he wasn't a Phil Murray. Mansfield was a great leader, but he wasn't a Lyndon Johnson. Those comparisons go back whether you're in the labor movement or whether you're in government or industry, it doesn't make any difference. Every leader has his own way, or his own stamp of approval of how he thinks it ought to be done. Generally that's what you're going to find, people are going to go along with that stamp of approval.

By and large I think that if you go back and look at that history, when Ed Muskie and Hubert and the rest of them were in there, they were really trying to do a job, but they didn't have all the votes they needed in some of these committees. Therefore it was slow--it was a very slow process. When a slow process performed itself under the eyes of Lyndon Johnson, he cut the tape and said, "Let's go, this is the way it's going to go, whether you want to or not." And he had enough leaders on the floor to do it. Mike Mansfield never pushed that way, and therefore he never had the kind leadership that did it. I think that's really the answer.

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RITCHIE: Well, you mentioned a couple of times that things changed dramatically after 1963. Do you think that the reasons why the legislative pace picked up and bills were successful was because Johnson was President and was more skillful as a legislative leader, or because of the shock over Kennedy's assassination?

HOFFMANN: I don't the assassination was the thing. Here again, you take a majority leader like Lyndon Johnson who is a pusher, and you put him into the presidency, and he knows how to push the legislation. That's really what took place. I don't think it was a reaction to Kennedy's death. I think the nation was shocked for a long time, and it was a very difficult time, but I think that Lyndon began in his own way: these are my reigns, I'm going to drive this horse. If you ever had the opportunity to go riding with Lyndon down at the ranch, well, I'll tell you, you go riding out in his car and go over these bumps, you don't know

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whether you're coming down in one piece or not. Just hang on, that's all you can do. We're going to a certain place and we're going to get there, that's the way he did it. He operated the presidency the same way. But when he was in the presidency he knew how to operate the Hill.

That's the difference between what you've got in Reagan and in Lyndon Johnson. Both very forceful people, but Lyndon understood this place up here, and others did not. It became very

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apparent that he wanted certain things to be done, and he did them. Take a look at his record. He had one hell of a record when he was President of the United States. I think the biggest shock that I ever got was the night when he announced that he wasn't going to run. I couldn't believe it when I listened to that, because here was an inveterate political person saying "I've had all I wanted and I'm getting out." It was very difficult, the war had a lot to do with that, I don't think there's any question about it. A lot of people don't give him credit for it, but I think it worried him more than anything else.

I knew him pretty well, and he was a tough taskmaster. But he was an honest guy, as far as when you sat down and talked to him about something, he would give you his opinion. Now, you might not like his opinion, but he was going to give you his opinion. Again it comes from knowing the operation. Take a look at what happened to Carter. Carter came in and didn't know anything about the Hill. He didn't hire anybody who knew anything about it. What happened? He went down the tubes. I mean as far as the cohesion between the two branches of government, and I don't think you can run a democracy that way. I think it takes time to understand. You can't just come up and say, "I'm going to disregard everything in Washington. They're not going to sell me. I'm going to do it the way we did it wherever I came from." It just doesn't work that way. It just is not going to work.

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But that's the way it goes, and that's what it was after those three years, in '63, when Lyndon became the President of the United States. He began to assert the power that he used when he was in the Senate. And if you want to look at the power he used in the Senate, he transferred that right to the White House and began moving from that direction. He knew how to shake the peaches so they wouldn't break when they hit the ground. He put a blanket under them.

RITCHIE: That's an interesting analogy!

HOFFMANN: But it's true, he put a blanket under the peaches. He knew how to operate with people, he applied to their egos, he applied to anything else. He applied to their patriotism. Oh, he pulled out every stop. And once he did that, then it looked like the whole thing moved fast. It didn't move fast, it was just there was nobody there to motivate it before, and that's the way it was.

RITCHIE: Did you get down to the White House much when Johnson was President?

HOFFMANN: I was there two or three times. I liked him. I was very fond of him.

RITCHIE: I was wondering, did he take personal charge of the lobbying of some of these bills? How did it work?

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HOFFMANN: No, I think he had his own people doing it, although he directed them as to what he was going to do, and he made the telephone calls. He called the key guys up here, that's the way it was done.

RITCHIE: In '65 and '66 there was an amazing rush of legislation. Bills that had been waiting for years. . . .

HOFFMANN: That's my point.

RITCHIE: But the one thing that he failed on was right-to-work legislation.

HOFFMANN: Right. Well, he couldn't do it. There was just no way to do it. Because you had right-to-work states and you had key guys who were up in the Senate who wouldn't move, and couldn't move. They couldn't take a position against that when their state already had a right-to-work bill. [George] Smathers in Florida, those were the kind of guys they had to work with. It was impossible for him to move ahead. Johnson did not like right-to-work; I mean, personally, that was not one of his bags. But he couldn't get the necessary pegs in the holes that had to do the operation, because they already had right-to-work states, all over. It wasn't his fault, it was a very difficult problem to try to devise any kind of strategy on.

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RITCHIE: The other divisive issue that came up, that you mentioned earlier, was the war in Vietnam. What kind of tensions did that create among the senators that you were working with, in particular the liberal Democratic senators?

HOFFMANN: Well, there were a lot of senators who were totally against this confrontation in Vietnam, and that caused a problem. I think that Lyndon was in a field in which--God forbid that I ever say this--he didn't know too much about. He was being advised by people who were grinding an axe one way or another, whether it was more troops, more planes, more whatever the hell it was. I don't think he realized that there had been another nation involved in that same place for many, many years, and could never solve any problems between North and

South Vietnam. I think once he got in it he was a bull, he was going to stay and this was the way it was going to go. You couldn't get him to dissent on any of this, because he didn't have enough of his cronies up here who were for maintaining a war presence in Vietnam, they wanted to get out. A lot of people up here thought we ought to have gotten out a lot earlier.

Lyndon was a strategist who understood how to count. He knew how to count the votes. He knew where they were. He knew where the strength was in the leadership, where the weaknesses were. But he was very much alone in this thing. I think in all the

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times that he was in the leadership in the Senate he always had a tremendous amount of guys around him who were helping him. On Vietnam it was divided, and it was divided so strongly that you couldn't put it back together. These people were getting tremendous pressures from home, for whatever reason, for sons or husbands or whoever had gone overseas to fight this catastrophic war that we weren't going to win.

He was such a bulldog that he wouldn't let it go. He just stuck there like a bulldog shaking an animal after he's captured it. He just stayed with it, and stayed with it. There was nobody who could talk him out of this thing. It was an unfortunate thing. I don't blame him for being there, because I don't think he was to blame. We were there before he got there. But by and large he felt that he was on the right track, and he was advised by some of his cohorts that we were on the right track. I don't think we were, but that's neither here nor there.

I never had any occasion to talk about it at all for the few minutes I saw him every once in a while. That never came up. He was more interested in talking about how things were going in the labor movement, and what we were doing. He kept saying to me: "You always say that the labor movement is doing all right but that management is not putting anything in the plants." I said, "That's right, but you give them a tax break every time you get a chance, and they're not using that tax break to reinvest in their

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properties." That was a going concern between he and I. But I think there was such division on Vietnam that he couldn't win it. He knew he couldn't win it, but he wasn't going to let go.

RITCHIE: It was about that time that you left the Steelworkers.

HOFFMANN: 1967.

RITCHIE: What was it, after all those years, that made you decide to leave?

HOFFMANN: I'd been with them I think twenty-three years at that point. I think that I felt that I had reached as high as I could go in that particular

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endeavor. I was very close to Abel. I was close to McDonald. I was close as hell to Phil Murray. I loved the Steelworkers, and I loved the job I was doing. But I felt that I was about as far as I could go. I didn't go out to seek the [Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee]. This came through Ed Muskie and Mike Mansfield. Would I take an early retirement from the Steelworkers? I had never even thought about it before. I did some thinking about it, and talked to Abe about it. I said, "I've got a chance to do something which I think I can make a contribution to." That's one of the things that motivates me. I took a look at this thing.

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I went in and had a long talk with Abel. I'll never forget it, Abe was in New York, I went up to see him and we had lunch together. I said, "You and I have been friends for a long time. I just think that I might take a chance at this thing, and I might do some good. I might help the Steelworkers at the same time." He said, "I believe you. I think you're absolutely right." He said, "You know you don't have to leave." I said, "I know that, that's not bothering me." But here was a chance to do a little bit better, and the same kind of work I'd been doing all the time anyway. So we made a pact. Mansfield and Muskie asked me to do it, and Abe said go. So that's how I changed after all those years. But I was really not changing anything. I was just doing the same thing I'd been doing, except on a different basis. From being on the outside, I was now on the inside. I began to see how things worked on the inside, which was a big help as far as I was concerned.

But I think the thing that was uppermost in my mind was that I got a free hand to do what I wanted to do. I remember one of the things that I wanted to do more than anything else was bring a young lady who had been working with me at the Steelworkers. Her name was Barbara Towles. She was a black girl, marvelous girl. When she was in the Steelworkers she was just a clerk, and she

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wanted to be a secretary. I said, "You go and take your courses and come back here and we'll make you a secretary." Well, we did. When I went up there, I said to Ed Muskie: "Can I take whoever I want to build this thing, because I've got to do a lot of building in this thing." You gotta know where it was at the time when I took it over! They wanted me to change a lot of things, Ed and Mike. They said, "Why?" I said, "I've got a black girl I want to bring in." At that point in time, in 1967, take a look at the records, there were no black girls in major positions in the United States Senate, none. She was the first one. She was my executive assistant. She handled all the money, she did everything. She was just a tremendous girl. Mike and Ed said, "Go ahead, do it."

Then I wanted to get young people involved in this thing. I wanted them to be dedicated to do it. Now this was 1967 to 1975. We held the Senate under all the Republican presidents. We never the lost the Senate. That was due basically to

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the effectiveness of these young people I brought on board. They had their own rights. If they disagreed they could tell me, and we would fight it out. There were no set ways because we were really chartering waters that nobody had chartered before. It was no reflection on anybody who went before, but we were doing things that had not been done. I remember one of the first things we got to do was the Fact Book. The Fact Book had always been done by

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the Democratic National Committee and they were pulling their horns back, so we had to do it. I gave that job to these guys. We had a meeting one night and I said, "Do you think you can do this?" They said, "Yeah, we think we can." I said, "Well, it's going to take a lot of research." They did a marvelous job. Whatever success I had there was due to those young people who were so damn dedicated. We began to bring in people who did television shows and radio shows, on how to promote a candidate. We had dog and pony shows on Saturday mornings over in the old Dirksen auditorium, and we'd bring these people in and they'd answer questions for two days. It gave them a chance to get to a candidate, to sell their wares to the candidate, so it was a two-way street. We were getting their advice, but they had a chance to make themselves available. I think that was a very, very helpful operation. I was in there under five or six different senators [as Chairmen of the Campaign Committee]. They all just said, "Go ahead, we're not going to touch it because you're evidently doing very well with what you have right now." We didn't have a lot of money. We were just people who were trying things that had never been tried before. They would come up with an idea, and we'd sit down and hash it over. I'd say, "Well, does it have merit, real merit?" And they'd say, "Yeah, we think so." We put teams together to go around to non-incumbents

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who were going to run. We'd take our teams out to tell them how to spend their money, how to get their media, all that stuff. We traveled all over the country. It was a very, very good operation, I think it was one of the best operations that I ever knew at that point in time. A lot of others have followed up and done some of that since then, but hell there was a guy like Marty Franks, who was with me, Bob Thompson, Sam Kinzer, Bob Thompson's sister. There were say ten or twelve kids that we had in there, they were all going to school. Coley O'Brien was another one. They were all going to school, and got time to do their work, and yet they all graduated with honors from their universities, and most of them became lawyers, and are very successful, which makes me feel good. They would have been successful with or without me, but it feeds my ego to say at least I had a chance to be with these kids.

We put this on a different basis than it had ever been before. We knew nothing. There were no records which we could go back to and refer to, like we have a record now. We didn't have any records. We had to play by the seat of our pants. I

think the convention we went to was '68. If I remember that was in Miami--don't hold me to that.

RITCHIE: '68 was Chicago.

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HOFFMANN: Chicago. Yes, Chicago, and that was the lesson that we learned, and it was a very tough lesson. But these kids worked so hard to get all this done. I remember two years later--two years? Four years later.

RITCHIE: You had mid-term party conference.

HOFFMANN: We went down to Miami. They took my station wagon and filled it with all the stuff we needed to take. Oh, these kids just worked so hard. They really knew what they were doing. I think this was a turning point. I became so interested in this because it was a success. Number one we had candidates. We provided TV stuff. I had my own 16mm projector in there and they would come down to the office and look at the pictures of somebody else's campaign. We made those things available to all candidates to look at and see what had been done. A lot of those things were small and didn't look very meaningful, but in some cases, hell a guy like John McClellan came down to look at the stuff and couldn't get over how well we were prepared to try to help him. That was a real turning point as far as my life. I'm getting up there in years. I was in that job from '67 to '75, when they suddenly came to me and said, "They want you to be the Sergeant at Arms of the Senate." I said, "You've got to be kidding, I wasn't even running for it." Anyway, that's another story. But by and

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large the people that were there made this thing work, it wasn't me. They were working and they had the right to do what they wanted to do. They never quit working. I never saw kids work harder than those kids did, every one of them.

RITCHIE: In every election you would have thirty-three or thirty-four candidates. Did you have resources to cover them all, or did you have to make decisions as to whom you would support?

HOFFMANN: We had limited money we could give each one. Each one got something. Not like today. Television alone is just unbelievably expensive. But we did have a chance to see these people operate, and we did give them money. We gave the incumbents money and the non-incumbents money. Oh, there was an uproar about that one time. Incumbents said, "We're raising the money, we ought to get the big share." I said, "If we're going to win the Senate we've got to take a gamble on something else." By and large it worked out pretty good. We didn't have too much fall-out from it. In some instances you might have had some, but not that much. The senators did everything they could for us. We had fund-

raisers, and they participated. In those days I think five thousand dollars we gave a senator, something like that. Maybe ten in some cases, if the race was close and we had the money. We did the same thing for non-incumbents.

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RITCHIE: Were there any times when you wrote somebody off because they were in such a hopeless race it was a waste to give them money?

HOFFMANN: Yes, in one case, there was a fellow in Delaware by the name of [Jacob] Zimmerman, who was going to run for the Senate [in 1970]. I didn't believe that he really had a chance. What we did was pay for a poll to find out what kind of a man they were looking for in Delaware. It wasn't Zimmerman. But we had to go along with it. I didn't deny him any money. I gave him as much money as I could give to him. But the next time it came around--you see you never know when you're doing the right thing--a young man came into my office two years later. He came in with his brother and he sat at my desk. He said, "I'm going to run for the Senate in Delaware." I had this poll. I knew a lot about this young man, but I wanted to find out if he had guts. So I really taunted him for the first fifteen minutes: "What makes you think you can run?" "Why should you be chosen?" "This costs money to do this?" "We don't have all the money in the world, and I'm sure you don't have it." I did this for about twelve minutes. Finally, he looked at me and said, "I don't have to take this crap from you." I said, "Senator, we are going to go for you. That's what I wanted to know." He said, "What?" I said, "I wanted to see if you had any guts." He said, "You were just

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telling me off?" I said, "That's exactly what I wanted to prove, and now here's why I said it," and I showed him this poll. He couldn't believe it. That was Joe Biden. He came through with flying colors. But he was going to tell me he wouldn't take my money and the hell with me, but I only wanted to know one thing: I wanted to know if he had the guts to turn me down, because I'm the guy with the money. He did, he told me he didn't have to take that. But outside of that, I don't think there was another senator--no, we never turned anybody down.

RITCHIE: How about in the other direction. Suppose you had a candidate whom you thought had a good shot. Would you go out and raise extra money, as you mentioned about Biden?

HOFFMANN: Oh, sure, I would, yes. We did that on several occasions. In fact, one of the men who is now sitting, the new senator from Nevada.

RITCHIE: Harry Reid.

HOFFMANN: He was one the guys we were trying to get in, and we were trying to tell him how to do it. When he got sworn in this last time, he came over to me and said, "Nurdy, if I had only listened to you I'd have been here years earlier!" Which is true, but that's neither here nor there. Sometimes that's the way the ball bounces. But we went out and raised money. I'd go to people

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and say, "Look, I think this guy's got a good shot. Take a look at him, and if you can, help him." We had a lot of ways to help people, that wasn't directly money coming from us, but basically from them putting it into the campaigns. It didn't have to go through the campaign committee. See, they wanted all of that money to be going through the campaign committee. I didn't believe in that. I felt that if these guys wanted to put some money in, they ought to have a rapport with the candidate, and that's the way it worked. I was pleased that it did work that way. I had no problems on that at all.

In the old days they used to be able to give money like this: a fellow came in one time and he said he had ten thousand dollars he wanted to give to Senator X. I said, "Why don't you give it to Senator X?" He said, "We want to run it through the campaign committee." I said, "Ten thousand dollars, what is that, cash?" He said, "Yeah." I said, "I'll give you a receipt." He said, "I don't want a receipt." "Well," I said, "that's the only way we're going to take it." He said no way, and I said, "I am not going to take your money. We're trying to do it legally and above ground." So I called the senator and said, "This man's here and he wants me to take ten thousand dollars for you, and I'm not going to take it. Do you want to meet him?" He said, "Run him out, I don't want any part of him."

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Well, that's the way you learn the game. We were very, very careful. We never exchanged money or anything like that.

We were called before the grand jury over in Baltimore at one point in time, and we had a set of books, which I kept from the first day on. We took the books over there, and the grand jury said they were the best books they had ever seen. We did not have any problems and they didn't bring us in for anything else but to find out information. We had that kind of information. That's what Mike wanted, and that's what Muskie wanted. They wanted us to set it up in that kind of an operation. It was legal and it was done above board. I think it would have fallen by its own weight if I hadn't done it that way. But with the young kids who were there, they were all idealists, and they were watching me like I was watching them. I still meet with these young kids, adults now. They were here for my birthday this year. Bob came in from Denver, and Sam came in from Seattle, they all came in and we had lunch. That's a lot of years, but every one of them is doing very well.

RITCHIE: You had taken over that job just a couple of years after Bobby Baker was doing it.

HOFFMANN: Yes.

RITCHIE: Did you get some feedback about the problems that existed before, and the need to reform that system?

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HOFFMANN: Yes, I got feedback. But I was given a free hand. Nobody argued with Mike, nobody argued with Muskie, and I was given free reign to put this thing on a legal, honest basis, which I did. Not that there was anything dishonest before, but records were very, very poorly kept. The first thing I did was go out and get Max Boyarsky and Company, auditors, to come in and set up books, and the whole works. We were absolutely meticulous about that sort of thing. I think it helped us in the long run, because there was no digging in deep drawers for money. You just laid it out there, and you put in every dime you took in. We were pretty tough on spending, because we didn't have that kind of money. The more money we spent on salaries, the less we could spend on campaigns. In those days I got people whom I had known all over the country who would give me contributions to help pay the salaries for these kids who were working for me, and it didn't come out of the money we were collecting in fund-raisers. I suppose that was a new thing too. But, yeah, I came in after the Bobby Baker days, and that's one of the things that Mike wanted cleaned up.

RITCHIE: Well, tell me, how do you go about raising money? Do you have a list of people you go to automatically when you've got a candidate?

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HOFFMANN: Let me show you how it works. I've got a picture on my wall out there of people I call my hall of fame. A couple of them are dead now. One of them was a friend of mine in New York, we had become friends over the years, a very wealthy man. He felt that he wanted to see me do this thing and do it right. I would call my friend and say, "I need money to make a payroll." He'd say, "Fine, how much do you need?" I'd tell him and he would call five or six of his friends, and they would send money--this was perfectly legal--send money down that would make the payroll. That's payroll to run your daily office.

When you wanted to raise money for campaigns you had people put on a party, and had people like Mansfield, and Muskie, and Russell Long, people of that nature, who went to the particular party wherever it was held, and that brought out other people. They'd pay whatever money they were charging them to come to this thing, and then the money would be handed to me and we would put it in the bank. The bookkeeping was all legal and everything was done exactly the way

it should be done. We would raise money that way. We also had the annual Congressional dinner which raised money.

If it were a candidate in the state, we would go out to the state and talk to anybody we knew out there that felt likely to support this candidate with money. That's the way we raised the money.

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RITCHIE: Did you start with labor organizations?

HOFFMANN: Not totally, but labor organizations were one of the first ones we would go to, because they had a good operation. Because having come from there I knew exactly where to go. It worked out very well, we didn't have any problem at all. We went to most labor organizations, not all of them, but most of them.

RITCHIE: And then you had sympathetic businesses, I suppose.

HOFFMANN: Oh, yeah, you had a lot of those. You had large supporters all over the country.

RITCHIE: I remember during Watergate it came out that some contributors were covering their bets by putting money on both candidates.

HOFFMANN: Oh, yes.

RITCHIE: Did you find that as well?

HOFFMANN: Not necessarily. If they did, I didn't know about it. There was no way that I could tell that they were giving to both sides. I think there was maybe one that I remember that did that, but I didn't have any proof of it. I just felt that he got himself in trouble doing that, he got caught later on doing that.

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RITCHIE: The federal elections were enacted shortly after Watergate, did they create more difficulties for you?

HOFFMANN: Oh, yes, because we had to be more careful. We had to make more reports. I had one young man, Bob Thompson, who was an expert on this operation. He would go to all the places we went to tell the candidates: these are the things you've got to be careful about; these are the things you've got to file. That was all part of the thing when we were bringing them in to run, these were the things you had to look at. In fact, Mike Berman, who helped me a lot in this whole operation, had great ideas, and of course Mike just felt that every candidate ought to have absolutely clean hands on anything he did.

These were the things that we were instructing the candidates when we met with them. We would each take a part of it, and it was divided so that one guy wouldn't be doing all the talking. One was on finances, one was on fund raising, one was on research, one was on the fact book, whatever. We had about five or six guys who went on these trips all over the country. I think that was one of the things that kept us from losing the Senate. One year we had "Save Our Seven Senators," SOSS, because we were seven from going down, but we won handily. It was due to the dedication of these young people. They just never quit trying.

RITCHIE: Now, you had a counterpart organization on the Republican side who were doing the same things to elect their candidates. Did you try to keep up with what they were doing?

HOFFMANN: No.

RITCHIE: Did you ever get feedback about their operations?

HOFFMANN: Oh, I knew what they were doing. Yes, we had information coming back. But we didn't have any cloak and dagger operation or anything like that, no. We found out. I knew the guy very well who was running the Republican campaign committee.

RITCHIE: The Republicans had a reputation for being very high tech. Did you get any pressure to computerize and follow the things that they were doing?

HOFFMANN: Oh, sure, we were doing the same thing. But they didn't know we were doing it. We were not high tech because we didn't have that kind of money, but as I said, if we wanted to find out something, we'd have a poll done. We'd get Peter Hart or some of those people to do it. We had all the top guys who were advising us, some of them are not in the business anymore, but in those days there were an awful lot of them that were in that particular phase. We utilized the best talent we could find to help these senators, and then we had our own team which would go out into the finite ideas of protecting them from the new laws

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which were taking effect. We had Bob, who was a lawyer, and then we had another lawyer who's now working for the campaign committee. He's been there for a long time, he was one of my guys. He told them how to keep their records and what they had to do. We'd have seminars in which we'd bring a lot of these people in, and they would address themselves to any of the questions that the candidates had.

Ed Muskie said that one of the reasons he got reelected was because he listened to what we were trying to tell him. You're running so long and the people that elected you are either dying or they're not interested anymore, so you've got to get young people. We had Young People for Muskie, and they went all over the state

of Maine, and they were ready. This guy [Robert] Monks spent millions of dollars on television, but these guys were already in every household in the whole area where this television would come in, so we had him beat before he got started. We didn't have the money that they did, but we had people who were out there, dedicated, working people. Lots of times this was the difference between day and night.

For instance, when Joe Biden started, they didn't have a lot of money. Of course, Delaware is not a big state. In order to do what they wanted to do, they would run mimeograph machines and

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they'd mimeograph all this stuff, and then they would take it by car to whatever areas they were going around the state, and these people would hand deliver it to every house. That saved mailing costs and everything else. This was all done by dedicated young workers. The only thing it cost was for the gas and money for paper. We would borrow or steal a mimeograph machine from somebody, and that's the way we prepared the information. That was probably one of the best operations I had ever seen, that Joe Biden had up in Delaware. But imagine, the state's small, so you produce this document which says whatever you want it to say, and it's all produced in Wilmington and then the cars take it out and deliver it over the weekends. No mailing costs. That's the only way we could keep up with them. Of course, there's diminishing returns on that. Sooner or later it's going to catch up with you. But by and large the people seemed to think that this was the way to go.

RITCHIE: During the Nixon years--and most of the time you were on the campaign committee, Nixon was in the White House--they were known for playing hard ball politics. Did you find cases of dirty tricks and unfair tactics being thrown against your candidates?

HOFFMANN: Well, see, I didn't spend any time worrying about that, I really didn't. They did what they wanted to do, and I knew that they had more money than we did, and they knew a lot of

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things. But all we did was prepare our people as well as we could with whatever amounts of money we had, and the devil take the hindmost. That's exactly the theory I used all the time, and our workers did the same thing. They sensed that that was the only chance we had. Yes, there were a lot of places where I knew that was going on, but there was nothing I could do about that. I only worry about things that I've got some control over. I don't worry about things I have no control over. I had no control over that. We just did our own, clean job as well as we could do it.

We would find little things. One race I think was in Iowa. The sitting senator was on the senior citizen's subcommittees, dealing with retirees. Some of our guys went to check and found out that he'd only been to two committee meetings the whole year. It happens that Iowa is one of the big retiree places in the country, whether you believe that or not. We utilized that, and our guy beat him. Just from our guys finding that this senator had not gone to the meetings. We checked the records and we utilized that, put out special things for senior citizens and retirees in Iowa, and that was a very effective campaign. Just a little thing, but little things are what trip up a campaign. It's not the big things, it's the little things. If you've got the little things under control, that's the best way to run a campaign.

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You run a campaign, really, from the seat of your pants when you're a Democrat, because you don't have all the fancy things that the Republicans have. More power to them, but the other thing it does, it makes the Democrats work a little harder.

RITCHIE: Well, you had a remarkable track record, considering that Nixon won in '68, and won in a landslide in '72, but in every election that you were with the campaign committee you carried the Senate.

HOFFMANN: We never lost the Senate.

RITCHIE: And you never had quite as bad a defeat as you had in '66--you didn't lose the Senate, but most of the new senators coming in were Republicans, like Howard Baker, Charles Percy, and Mark Hatfield. To what do you attribute your string of successes?

HOFFMANN: Probably dumb luck. But also things like the case I gave you about finding out that the guy was on the retirees subcommittee and didn't come to but two meetings. There's not a lot of money involved in something like that. But we were able to do that because we had a lot of dedicated people over there, and staff people who were helping us also. We did that kind of research, and when we came up with something like that we were able to make it burst at the top point of an election. I think it was the fact that we stayed with this as long as we could, realizing that you don't have the kind of money that you'd like to

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have, but you have the kind of dedicated people who are smart enough to find out these little things that make a difference as far as the election is concerned. Just like the thing with Biden. We did the poll, found out that Zimmerman wasn't the guy, but the next time we found that Biden was the guy. We paid for the poll in the Zimmerman election, and that was the thing that gave us Joe Biden.

It was the same thing with guys like Pat Leahy. Pat Leahy says the reason I got him to come to the Senate was because I wanted to keep my control of the Senate and he was the easiest one to get in. Well, that was not true, and he knows it. But we got Pat Leahy the same way. We went up there with this team--I keep referring to this team because they were just unbelievable--in just a short period of time we could do the whole thing, and we'd minimize it. We were running some of our things out of the airport in Kansas City, because we were helping [John] Culver in Iowa, we were going down to Oklahoma, we were going into Kansas, we were going into Missouri. So we did the whole thing from right out there. Instead of coming back here and going out, we'd stay there and move the team for one day into one of these places. That saved us an awful lot of money, transportation-wise.

That's the way it really worked. That I think was what our success was all about, being on the ground floor, trying to do the kind of things we had to do. We had to go back to some places

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twice, but we did it. Everybody helped--you don't do any of this alone. When they began to believe we had put the right package together, then they supported us, and did a good job of it.

RITCHIE: Did you have any heart-breakers, candidates that you really thought had a good shot at it but didn't make it? Any particular disappointments?

HOFFMANN: I don't remember any, because we didn't lose the Senate. See, if I had lost the Senate by one or two, I'd have probably have had that feeling. But inasmuch as we didn't ever lose the Senate, I thought we were in pretty damn good shape. Therefore that didn't concern me too much. I'm not one of these guys who looks back. I'm looking forward. Whatever happened yesterday, that's fine and dandy, but that belongs to somebody else, not me. I want to find out what's going to happen tomorrow.

[End of Interview #4]