

THE SENATE REPUBLICAN CONFERENCE

Interview #6

September 27, 1993

[Prior to this interview, Robert Vastine and Donald Ritchie encountered Elaine Franklin, chief of staff to Senator Robert Packwood, in a corridor of the Hart Senate Office Building. She described giving a deposition regarding the senator to the Senate Ethics Committee.]

VASTINE: I have long been an admirer and a watcher, in a sense, of Packwood because he was becoming influential in the Senate when I worked for Senator Percy in the early '70s. He was one of those senators who joined in the early effort—even though he did not follow through with it—in the convention of 1972 in Miami to rewrite the convention rules to give more weight to the larger states in the delegate selection process.

I got to know him then; and when I came back to work for Senator Chafee, he was, of course, a prominent member of the moderate wing. And he was very close to Chafee and was a constant companion on the squash courts. They have a squash league—I mean, the two of them play squash several times a week. And they have a kind of understanding, it seems: one never gets very far ahead of the other. But there is a constant competition. They give each other enough rope to let one get out in front, and then the other comes back. Then the other one falls behind. And it sash-shays back and forth, I think, by some subliminal agreement. [Laughs]

So because Packwood was a big supporter of Chafee's, I made it my goal to get Packwood to be an intense user of the Republican Conference facilities upstairs in the Hart Building here; and indeed won him over. Not without a lot of effort and not without engaging his discontent, because things for him had to be *really* perfect. I don't think I have met a more vain member of the Senate. He is so attuned to his appearance on the camera, and he has studied so hard how to make the best of his appearance. He takes a pose, and he never leaves it in front of the camera. He has got a studied pose. It consists of sitting on the

edge of a table with one knee up leaning slightly forward, shoulders at an angle to the camera, head looking up. He has obviously decided that that's his best angle, and he uses it all the time.

Elaine Franklin, the woman we just spoke with in the hall, has a remarkable relationship with him. She will actually comb his hair for him before he goes on camera. This is his administrative assistant! Who comes into the studio to be sure that his makeup is right and that his hair is combed, and *does* the combing. Astonishing.

RITCHIE: Well, what do you think of all these charges [of sexual harassment] against him? They seem incongruous given his record in Congress.

VASTINE: I think he's the victim of a national reaction. Also a change in the composition of the Senate with more women as members. Barbara Mikulski is on the Ethics Committee. A faction in Oregon that wanted to get rid of him and couldn't at the polls and seized upon this as a means afterward to try to diminish him and even shake him from office. I don't think he deserves it. From what I know he *did* misbehave and was well known to have misbehaved in the sense that he made passes at women. But there's nobody I know that says a woman who refused the passes was somehow hurt by him afterward: that he took retribution against them. I've never heard that charge.

I guess maybe he's the product of—well, I don't know, strike that. I was going to say he was the product of the time when it was possible to do that. But I'm a product of the same time, and I was taught that that was very bad behavior; and you don't make passes at women. Certainly if you are the employer you don't make passes at women. It's just not done! And it is a great lapse on his part that he might have done that. But I think the reaction has been extraordinary.

I'm no student of the Ethics Committee, but it certainly did not cover itself with honor in the case of the Keating Five. For example and specific reference to tarring John McCain, Senator McCain. Keeping his case active and

not terminating his part of the case simply out of partisanship, it seemed. Even though the special counsel recommended that charges against him be dropped.

RITCHIE: Since you've been watching the Senate and the Congress in general, how well does Congress handle its ethics cases on its own members.

VASTINE: Oh, that's such a hard question. I'm afraid to hazard that.

RITCHIE: It's a very difficult thing for a collegial body, I think.

VASTINE: Here's an observation—I guess, I felt, and my colleagues on the staff of the Senate felt, that the Ethics process was a necessary institutional response to abuses. In the case of Harrison Williams it produced the right result. I watched that case. I watched the statements on the Senate floor. I found it pathetic, and I felt sorry for him. But I thought he got what he probably deserved. And I guess I felt, also, that digression aside, that, in a way, ethics processes of the Senate and the House were designed to do what was necessary to be done but to really protect the body. And maybe err on the side of leniency when possible. And temper public ire. And, in doing all that, preserve the institution from additional public contempt, which I think is, finally, in the higher interest of the republic. This does not mean that the committee did the right thing in the case of the “Keating Five.” Quite the reverse. In “protecting” the Five, they hurt the institution.

RITCHIE: The easy way out for them, of course, is to let the voters make the decision. But in Senator Packwood's case, he'd just gotten reelected. So . . .

VASTINE: Yes.

RITCHIE: . . . it would be six years before that would happen again.

VASTINE: Well, as Elaine was just saying, she feels, and I know others feel, that the Ethics Committee counsel are going beyond the confines of these

allegations against him on a fishing expedition against Senator Packwood. If that's indeed the case, I think that's very unfortunate. But I think it's quite appropriate in the context you've just framed, that is to say a senator who has just been elected and has six years ahead of him to look at the specific charge, and look at it fairly, and give the senator his day as well. So I guess that's the necessary thing. I would only hope that it's gotten done with because dragging it on and on and on and on is not in the public interest either. They do take a very long time, and I guess that—I mean, in the case of [Alphonse] D'Amato, took forever, and could materially have hurt him. But he's such a fighter that he managed around it somehow.

The case of the Keating Five took forever as well. Much longer than it should have. So one has to wonder about the structure and the process and the approach of the staff and the dedication of the chairmen to moving the process along as quickly as possible. I was thinking—just now—that maybe there ought to be an eminence like a former federal judge, with undisputed character and standing, sort of put in as a referee. Do you know what I mean?

RITCHIE: Well the senators. . .

VASTINE: Sort of a surrogate chairman.

RITCHIE: They clearly don't like serving on the committee. They try to get off as much as possible.

VASTINE: They don't. They try to get off of it. Anyway, that is where we are.

RITCHIE: Well, we ended last week just before you had gone to the Republican Conference. And I'd like to ask about the Conference today, starting with Senator Chafee's role as chairman of the Conference. What exactly does the chairman of the Conference do? And why was he interested in running for that position in the first place?

VASTINE: Well, Senator Chafee is a Marine. He served twice on active duty on the front lines. He's a product of a family with a tradition of public service, as I understand it, and a prominent family in Rhode Island. He was Skull and Bones at Yale. He is a former member of the Board of Directors. Member of the Yale Board of Trustees. Three times governor of the State of Rhode Island. And Senator Chafee is a man who likes to be at the heart of things. He's a team player at heart, and he likes to be in the inner circle of the team. For him, even though a moderate and not a very likely candidate to be a member of the Senate leadership team, it was something to which he aspired. And, he ran, I believe, in '74 against—no.

RITCHIE: Eighty-four.

VASTINE: Yes, '84. When did I take the job? Elections for conference—leadership elections occur the same year as elections for House, and those are even years, right? So I started in '85, so it was '84 that Senator Chafee was elected conference chairman. Is that right? November of '84.

RITCHIE: I think so.

VASTINE: . . . and I began January 3, or whatever it was, of '85. Good, Lord! It seems like forever. How is that possible?

But I think he had in '82, or maybe '80, had run against Senator Garn to be secretary of the conference. So, he had kind of signaled his interest in leadership earlier in his time in the Senate and therefore it wasn't a surprise that he might try again in '84. He tried because he had the backing of moderate bulls like Packwood and Danforth and others. And because it was a new day. It was a new leadership team taking over. And because he had been close to Dole, in Dole's chairmanship of the Finance Committee.

And because he *worked* at it. And Jake Garn didn't. Jake Garn took a vacation, and didn't really take seriously the job of campaigning for conference chairman, and Chafee did. He worked it very hard. And he won! I think it was

by two votes. I think it was 27-25 or 27-24. So, it was a fair margin, as these things go. We could check that by looking at how many Republicans there were in '85. Because, as you know, and the record should show, former senators don't get to vote. The group that votes in these leadership elections which have occurred typically in November, consists of senators who will be in office the next January in the next Congress.

So he partly got elected on a platform of activism. Having run a Republican Conference task force on U.S. competitiveness in international trade. This task force was about twenty to twenty-five senators and convened a staff working group, of which I was chair. My job was to create this intellectual framework in which you had measures relating to technology, and research and development, and measures relating to capital formation, measures relating to taxation, measures relating to judicial process. Measures which we Republicans thought should be enacted to stimulate American competitiveness.

We deliberated for about a month or so, and we basically just put together a master list of reasonable Republican bills. And a whole bunch of them got enacted. Well, that's not surprising because we were in the majority. But, it was a nice way of conceptualizing and framing the issues. So Chafee took a lot of credit for that. And senators acknowledged that it was a relatively innovative thing to do. The other part of it was that the conference had been very badly run. It had been run, really, by Margot Carlisle.

But she had also formed the Steering Committee, the so-called Senate Steering Committee—was the animating genius and spirit, at the staff level certainly. It was her particular obsession with matters of defense—missiles and bombs—that she carried as well into the conference. She organized the conference in a very odd way. She had her choice of office space in the Hart Building. She chose, instead of a contiguous set of offices or contiguous suite, she chose to have, let's say, about 800 square feet or 900 square feet of space on the atrium in one part of the building but on the same floor, the fourth floor, but the bulk of the space was down the hall on the same floor looking out the other direction toward Second Street. Very strange! Well, it was because she wanted

to retire to her suite of offices where she had an enormous, personal office, a conference room, another office, and a small secretarial bay. She didn't have any windows—she didn't have any access to windows because she wanted to protect herself from the bombing that was inevitably going to be inflicted on our building by unnamed terrorists. That gives you a picture of Margot.

Meanwhile, the staff down the hall in Room 405 was run by Patty Jackson, who was director of Programs and Administration. She was effectively the number two. So the mission of the conference was implemented by her. But she didn't believe in a lot of it. I mean she was a skeptic about the conference's communication efforts which were nascent in those days. But she was the institutional memory. She had joined the Conference staff in the '70s, when Senator Carl Curtis was chairman, and the Conference lacked its own offices.

When I came, the conference had a staff of about 27 including maybe as many as seven writers, a full complement. And a staff of two who dealt with foreign media. And one graphics design person. And two or three or four people—well, certainly two people, who, one of whom is now chief of staff to the governor of Arizona, interestingly—whose purpose was to do broadcasting. Radio and television broadcasting. Actualities and videos. We had a camera; but we did not have a professional camera man. And then there were miscellaneous other folks, some of the conservative true believers hired as a favor. But, as I said, the main product was print, and the print product was a series of monthly columns: “family issues forum;” “foreign policy forum;” “economic forum.” You name it! A forum for everything. There were a dozen of these at least. And these folks were busy writing these columns.

Well, the columns were ghosted pieces written for senators. The idea was that Republican senators would sign these and then they would be distributed in camera-ready form. They would be distributed to newspapers all over the country for insertion in the paper. We did a study when I came in which showed that they were never used! They never made it into the papers, and for very good reason! What does a paper in Texas care about what dear old Jim Abdnor of Dakota—former Senator Jim Abdnor of Dakota—thinks about arms

negotiations when he was not an authority or spokesperson on that issue. So this was a useless effort. It was really useless!

I walked into this mess where the staff was at war with itself. Patty Jackson was totally at odds with the communications people. And my job was to find a new mission, really. I decided that it just seemed obvious. I don't know the moment at which I decided it, but I've gotten way ahead of the story, haven't I?

RITCHIE: It's okay.

VASTINE: You asked me about Senator Chafee and I'm telling you about this. Anyway, I can go back to Senator Chafee.

My job was to redefine the mission of the organization, and I decided to put most of our eggs in the electronic communications basket and away from print communications and, basically, we stopped all of those publications. We just didn't do them any more. I built up the video and radio side and the graphics side, and we really made a name for ourselves.

About a year later along came Rick Smith—Hedrick Smith—to do his *The Power Game*, I think it was called. In that book he spent two or three pages on the Republican Conference. He called me an executive producer or something like that. But, basically, all, of course, in a very critical context because he presented what we did as part of the elaborate structure of incumbent perks that the Senate had constructed for itself. Even though there was a tone of admiration about what we had accomplished, the context was negative because this was all bad. This couldn't be in the public interest, and he made me defend it in the book.

But back to Senator Chafee. Senator Chafee won the job, and for him, it provided access to White House and other internal councils. Go to the White House on Tuesdays or whenever for Republican leadership meetings, to be at the head of his party in ceremonial and other events and to be acknowledged as the

number three person in the official Senate Republican leadership. And, after all, we were in the majority, so it was a very gratifying thing for him.

On the day he was elected, I told him that I might like to be considered for the job. And he said, “Well that sounds interesting to me, too.” About three weeks later he made the decision, and he came down and presented me to Margot who took the decision with great anger and resentment, as though she expected to be kept on. She had not made many friends outside the circle of the steering committee. And the great come-uppance of the Steering Committee was that, in the end, she could only deliver eight votes for [James] McClure. I did not mention that McClure had been the Conference chairman, and she worked for him.

RITCHIE: Then he ran for majority leader [in 1984].

VASTINE: Then he ran for majority leader. Of course he didn't win—against a field of four others?

RITCHIE: Yes. Stevens. . .

VASTINE: Stevens, Domenici. . .

RITCHIE: And Dole.

VASTINE: Dole. And McClure was the first down with only eight votes. Then I think Domenici might have bowed out. Then it was Stevens and Dole; and Dole won by two.

Margot was very, very bitter.

RITCHIE: Well, what the Democrats and Republicans do is very different. In the Democratic Conference, the floor leader is also the chairman of the Conference. But the Republicans have separated it so that the Conference

chairperson is separate from the floor leader. What exactly is left for the Conference leader to do? That's what I've never understood.

VASTINE: Damn little. The Conference had a very weakly defined mission before I came along. And by seizing communications and electronic communications and installing the technology, mobilizing the money and the staff to buy the video and radio and graphic technology, in doing that, we gave the conference its first, clear mission.

Now, in addition to that, the chairman of the Conference convenes conferences and, further in addition to that, we've got a tradition now of off-site conferences that we do—at least annually—issue conferences. During two-day retreats. Which senators sort of grudgingly come to, without a hell of a lot of enthusiasm, even though my effort was to make them as much fun and as interesting as we possibly could. It's kind of a cringe to have to go spend a weekend with your colleagues when you see quite enough of them the rest of the time. Especially when there isn't a hell of a lot of collegiality or warmth amongst many of them.

But, you asked about the role of the Conference chair. Officially, it's to convene conferences, and preside at conferences. But even that is dicey. Even that's gotten dicey because a lot of it has to do with venue. For example, if we had had our own conference chamber or Senator Chafee had had a great, big room where you could convene fifty Republican senators easily, it would have been easier for Senator Chafee to dominate those conferences. But what happened was that we always had trouble getting a room; and so Senator Dole volunteered his personal office for these conferences. Well, his personal office can seat fifty senators. And, suddenly, we were meeting under the auspices of Senator Dole who would, of course, turn over the meeting to Senator Chafee or let him convene it. But Dole's presence was, you know, pervasive during the conferences.

So, "what is a conference" got kind of vague. Is this a caucus? Where Senator Dole chairs, or at least is in contention for chairmanship. Or is this a

conference, where Senator Chafee, the Conference chairman, presides? Now, in some cases, it's in Dole's interest not to preside! Very interesting. Sometimes Dole didn't want to preside! It's perfectly fine and good, thank you, to let somebody else handle this hot potato! And just let him be a spokesperson—I mean—in the sense of expressing maybe his own point of view. Or just have the conference be a sounding board so he could figure out what he might do. I think that's the way he used some of those conferences we had—just to hear what other members, where they were coming from so he could set his course appropriately.

RITCHIE: Would conferences be called on specific issues?

VASTINE: Oh, yes. But not frequently. I was always told and had the impression, that Democrats would conference at the drop of a hat! There was a period of time when they were constantly caucusing. I remember toward the end of '88, '89.

So, anyway, does that answer your question?

RITCHIE: They would hold the conference on a specific issue, let's say, to give members a chance to speak their mind on things.

VASTINE: Well, and also to let the administration come forward.

RITCHIE: Oh, okay, to bring in administration witnesses.

VASTINE: Not as witnesses, as spokesmen, advocates. Like the great, big budget deal.

RITCHIE: Yes.

VASTINE: You know, the budget deal, the breaking of the tax pledge.

RITCHIE: Yes.

VASTINE: There were lots of meetings around that. A lot. And Sununu and [Richard] Darman and [Nicholas] Brady all came to those meetings.

RITCHIE: Were they also intended to try to get some unity? I mean, to get everybody, sort of consensus?

VASTINE: Surely. Oh, definitely.

RITCHIE: Do they ever do that?

VASTINE: Rarely. I would say the high water mark in unity in my recollection was the unanimous Republican opposition to [Bill] Clinton's economic plan of this past spring. That was extraordinary. There were very few times when the Republicans were able—to a man—to agree on an issue. Of course, there is a provision of Conference rules which says that no decision of the Conference is binding on all its members. So there's no obligation. I think if there were provisions such as that in Conference rules, they wouldn't even come to conferences. Just to say "I didn't know." [Chuckles]

Did I answer?

RITCHIE: Yes. It's a structural issue. At to what exactly the Conference does. What's the relationship of the Conference chairman to, say, the Republican Policy Committee and the Republican Steering Committee and things like that? Is he ex officio member? Is he a chair of anything?

VASTINE: Well, you know the Steering Committee is not a recognized [party organ].

RITCHIE: Did the Republican Party have its own steering committee?

VASTINE: No.

RITCHIE: Other than the Steering Committee?

VASTINE: No, no. N-O.

RITCHIE: The Democrats have a steering committee.

VASTINE: The Steering Committee is a misnomer.

RITCHIE: I remember Senator Byrd standing up on the floor one day saying, “What is the Senate Steering Committee?”

VASTINE: Yes. “What is this, and who is this Margot Carlisle?” he asked. No. It does not. The Steering Committee is just what we would now call a caucus of like-minded members.

And I recall one time when it became obvious where the Steering Committee as an entity was going to be trying to get Senator Chafee out of his job. I once tried to make a count of who they were. And narrow it down so that we would know precisely. There were at that point maybe, as I recall, fourteen to seventeen senators who could be considered to be members of the Steering Committee though just 'cause you went to a Steering Committee lunch didn't really mean you were on board the Steering Committee program like a Wallop would be. I would say Senator [Malcolm] Wallop was at the heart of the Steering Committee and McClure. McClure then Wallop after him. Wallop, I believe, took over leadership of the Steering Committee.

RITCHIE: Was it a self-appointed group?

VASTINE: Oh, *definitely*. Oh, yes. Completely informal. Though, I think in this case they—the senators who were members—contributed to the support of the staff. The staff chief after Margot was a very able woman named Jade West. And she had some people working for her. They had a small staff, and I think they got some space in the Hart Building. I know they were not officially recognized as a Senate entity.

RITCHIE: I recall that's when Senator Byrd raised the question. I think they got into the telephone directory, and he stood on the floor and said, "Who is the Senate Steering Committee?"

VASTINE: It's the same thing as the Wednesday Group. The Wednesday Group in the Senate is an informal luncheon group that meets Wednesdays, obviously. Some Wednesdays, maybe once a month. I don't know how often. There is no staff in that case, and there is no effort to house them in the building. And there's no, you know, no listing. Senator Chafee is, I think, is the sort of nominal chair, convener. It's his secretary who used to organize the next luncheon.

RITCHIE: Well, I guess my initial question was sort of really what is the chairman's of the Conferences role, say on things like Policy Committee. Does he have any voice in policy?

VASTINE: Well, the Policy Committee per se never meets. The Policy Committee consists of the ranking members of the authorizing committees—or let's say of the standing committees plus a few others. And it never meets. The Policy Committee is the instrument of the Policy Committee chairman and staff director. And the program of the Policy Committee is determined by those individuals, by its staff. It's not determined by the leadership in any sense. It's kind of a fiefdom for its chairman.

You asked about one other position, the Conference secretary. Now the Conference secretary is the person who *really* doesn't have a role. For Garn it didn't matter, because he was a conservative and thought the less government, the less staff, the less mishmash, the better. Don't need to have a role, and the Conference secretary; and if somebody wants me to count whether there is a quorum or not, then I'll count whether there is a quorum. But I don't need anybody on my staff to do that for me.

When Garn left it and Cochran got it, it was something like \$170,000 budget for the conference secretary. That meant they could have two, two and a half, or three people in a little office in the Dirksen Building. They struggled to find a niche. They did some statistical work analyzing Senate votes. They did the vote analyses. Who voted how on what, how the vote split up. But there's precious little they could do. Nonetheless, staff allotment has grown. I once called up Keith Kennedy, whom you know [minority staff director of the Senate Appropriations Committee] and I said, "Keith, is it okay if we get another \$50,000 to do x, y, z." He said, "Look, Bob. The bottom line is you can have anything you want, God dammit. You're leadership. You can have it if you get Dole to agree to it." A sort of bitter resignation. So, these budgets just sort of increased. I don't know where they are now, but I wasn't greedy. I was very careful. Senator Chafee was not greedy. Chafee once said, "Now don't spend everything in your budget. Leave something left over."

RITCHIE: That's the Marine Corps way. The Marine Corps always turned back part of the budget.

VASTINE: Well, okay. I didn't know that, but that's what he wanted me to do. And I was cautious not to push too hard. I wanted to get the equipment we needed. I wanted to make sure we had the staff we needed, but my goal was not to be profligate, or appear to be. I think by the time I left we had rather significantly increased the overall budget of the conference, but not massively.

RITCHIE: Can you tell me, is it the sense then on the Republican side that the leadership is diffuse. . .

VASTINE: Yes.

RITCHIE: . . . or is it really concentrated in the Republican leader. In other words, is it on paper diffuse and in reality in the leader. Or is it diffuse in reality as well?

VASTINE: The reality is that under Dole it is diffuse. I think if there were a leader whose style was different and who was in constant consultation with the elected leadership and used them as his kitchen cabinet and his advisers and his implementers, then the leadership would be more cohesive. But Dole is not. This is not a criticism of Senator Dole. It is just a matter of style. He tends to listen a long time and then make up his mind, then act; and he's very, very good. He's a wonderful leader, but that's the way he does that.

But to answer your question, it's very diffuse. People go their own ways. Particularly when you have Senator Chafee representing Rhode Island who some call the most democratic state in the union. Here's a senator who gets elected in Rhode Island miraculously. There are only about 14,000 registered Republicans in Rhode Island.

So this man, obviously, has to vote differently than Trent Lott of Mississippi has to vote. Or Wallop of Wyoming. So having him in the leadership of a party that became increasingly conservative over the years—over the six years that I was staff director. I would say we lost moderates and we gained conservatives. Especially, again, conservatives from the House: Trent Lott; Dan Coats, whom we got along famously with and who appreciated us, but voted against Senator Chafee, on ideological grounds. But they *loved* our services, and said so! Stood up and said so. Senator Lott in the last election—Chafee's last election, in which he got defeated—got up and said, "You know, this isn't about the Conference. The Republican Conference is well run. It's about Senator Chafee. He's too liberal. I don't think we can afford to have somebody representing us who does not represent us, who does not represent the point of view of the majority of us." That's a very valid concern. But we only lost by one vote.

You'll have to remind me to tell you about Senator [John] Heinz's mea culpa.

RITCHIE: Well, why don't you tell me about it. [Laughs]

VASTINE: Well, it may be out of place. I was just thinking about leadership elections and the two, two leadership elections that I had witnessed. They're very interesting events. They're presided over by the Conference chairman, so I had to put together the agenda and get Chafee ready for it with some minor help from Howard Greene.

But, of course, Chafee's first term was the '85-'86 term when we were in the majority; and we at the Conference worked ourselves silly to help people like Paula Hawkins, and [Mack] Mattingly, and [Jeremiah] Denton, and others who lost. [Slade] Gorton—that is the election Gorton lost, isn't it?

RITCHIE: Yes.

VASTINE: Gorton should *not* have lost. That's one we should have won. But the others were probably not winnable. Except there are those who argue that Denton would have won but for the dastardly last minute campaign mounted with AFL-CIO help against Republicans on the grounds that they were against Social Security. That was the silver bullet that brought down a few people, including, it is thought, Denton, who might have eked it out. But there were others like Paula Hawkins, who could not have been saved. Even Divine Intervention might not have been enough. She was a real goner.

Anyway, we had two years in the majority; and Senator Heinz was chairman of the Republican National Senatorial Campaign Committee. Quite a remarkable figure, Senator Heinz. I liked him very much even though he was sometimes irascible and difficult. But I liked him partly because he liked my programs, and he helped me out. He funded the Conference, especially satellite-acquisition of satellite time. Which was quite expensive.

RITCHIE: This is money raised by the campaign committee?

VASTINE: Yes, which under the Senate rules then could be made available for use by individual senators through something called COMBO.

COMBO is an acronym, and it was called Communications—hmmm! Communications and Business? I’m going to forget it. I thought it was Communications and Business Account. But the O at the end. No, it evades me. Anyway. These so-called COMBO accounts were for the use of senators in the conduct of their communications and other business. And they were controversial, very! Common Cause annually attacked them. But it was the device by which the senatorial committee funneled campaign funds through us for the use of senators. So we would use x amount of the senator’s COMBO for his satellite feed. And we would bill it to the senator, so the billing looked like we never spent any of it. We were just the intermediary for the use of the money. Anyway, we don’t have to get into the niceties of that.

But I liked Senator Heinz, and he worked hard to produce a majority in 1986, but didn’t. He had to come to the Conference right after the election, which was that year held in the Old Senate Chamber, and kind of face his colleagues. I talked to his AA before the event a couple of hours during the morning and said, “Now look, Senator Chafee would like to thank Senator Heinz for all he’s done. For all his efforts. But that’s going to require him *being* there.” [Laughs] “When is Senator Heinz going to be there? What’s he going to do?”

But I set them all up, warned them. I mean, I told them one of the first things Chafee would do would be to acknowledge Senator Heinz’s efforts, and then ask Senator Heinz to introduce the new members, Kit Bond and I can’t remember who else. We had another good member come in that year. And Heinz was late! So we had to finesse and do something else. And Chafee, I think, introduced the new members. Finally, Heinz came in and was recognized, and he said, “If this were Japan, I would have committed harikari.” It was one of the few times I’ve seen him truly kind of chagrined, you know, not his polished, very articulate, fluent self. A difficult—very, very difficult moment for him to stand in front of his colleagues and discuss a terrible defeat.

RITCHIE: And, yet as you say, many of those cases probably were unsalvageable. They were people, in many cases, who won on Reagan’s coat tails and didn’t have them in ’86. . .

VASTINE: Well, there was an argument that Reagan really didn't have coat tails. That all these people won because they won because they won. But, you know, it's hard to say. I heard Heinz stand up and dispute the coat tails theory. "These people *didn't* win just because of Reagan's coat tails. My candidates won because they were good candidates! And they will win again." That was the theme. But it didn't work, did it?

RITCHIE: Speaking of catching Senator Heinz off guard, I once walked down on the Senate subway platform when he was standing there by himself. As I stepped behind him, I realized he was whistling "Hail to the Chief." And when he turned around and saw me, he turned crimson. [laughs] I felt I had interrupted a private fantasy.

VASTINE: It's a great shame his career was interrupted. I was very stricken by it because, as I said, he knew me, and that's always nice to have a senator who will acknowledge you, and wave at you, and talk with you at a party, and give you a ride home in a cab and all that. But the main thing the man had was such an incredible vibrancy. You can disagree with his policy. He was kind of a protectionist—I didn't find that very admirable. But, the bottom line is he was a man of tremendous vigor, and fun. There was really a strong spirit there. Even though there were times he could behave like a spoiled rich kid and get very upset. My first contact with him came when I came back as Senator Chafee's leg. Director, and we had competing interests in the Finance Committee around a trade bill. Heinz wanted to do some nasty stuff to a trade bill. We were without a trade LA at that moment, and I had very strong free-trade views. I got Chafee to oppose Heinz right in the Finance Committee. And Heinz sitting a seat away from Chafee, so Heinz knew damn well I was advising Chafee on what and how I was advising him. So I kind of caught the wrath of the moment.

Heinz would get very petulant when he didn't get his way. Really petulant! Stamp his feet. Get red in the face. I mean, almost literally stamp his feet. On the Senate floor sometimes you felt that he *was* stamping his feet.

When he didn't get his amendment. He didn't get his way a lot because senators didn't like his manner. But, on the other hand, they loved Senator Chafee's manner. Senator Chafee is a very smart fellow who gets along with people by being very considerate and very nice. So, when senators can, they will give him his amendment. Be nice to John Chafee because he is so nice to them. It's quite a style he's developed, actually. Because when he was going to disagree with the leadership—even as conference chairman or even before being conference chairman—when he was going to go against the leader, he let everybody know that really clearly, and why. There were never surprises. He always signaled well in advance that he was not going to be on board, and that has to be appreciated by any leader. You've got to know where your people are, and not be surprised by a defection.

You never had the feeling that Chafee was underhanded or less than candid or less than above board.

RITCHIE: What was Chafee's relationship with Dole, when he was Conference chairman and Dole was the leader?

VASTINE: Tenuous. Difficult. Sometimes you had the feeling that Chafee and Dole were together. And sometimes you felt there was a lot of anger. Oh, yes, there were times when there was a lot of anger, not on Chafee's part, though.

Once, for example, at one of the Tuesday regular policy lunches which are chaired by the chairman of the Policy Committee, but effectively are caucuses and could just as well be chaired by the chairman of the Conference. Or, by the majority or minority leader. Very odd these leadership things. But they were always chaired by Senator [William] Armstrong in our time who, I must say, always conducted them in an exemplary fashion; very fair, excellent chairman.

So Chafee got up and made a speech. Chafee had been clearly in opposition to the leadership on a particular issue. Can't remember the issue,

but at this particular event, policy committee event, he stood up and made a party loyalty speech on another issue. And Sheila Burke, chief of staff to Senator Dole, snorted from across the table, “*Such* a good soldier!” So, when you’re in disagreement with the leader a lot, its hard to be. . .

The Senate is interesting, isn’t it? Senator Chafee and Senator [John] Danforth are known to be “best friends” in the Senate. I mean, that was always the word bruited about in the staff. And then Senator Chafee, one day, referred in his last leadership election, when he couldn’t get Senator Danforth’s AA to call him back on a vote-getting effort, he said, “So much,” he said, “for my *best* friend in the Senate.” With some irony. But that aside, I think Danforth and Chafee are genuinely fond of each other and could be counted to be each other’s best friend in the Senate. I don’t know that myself, personally.

Now, who’s your friend? People don’t have lots of good friends in the Senate, seldom. Because your interests compete so often. It’s hard. I was always told that Howard Baker and [Ernest] Hollings were the best of friends. Couldn’t imagine why, but, indeed, apparently, it was true. They were very good friends. [Laughs]

RITCHIE: Well, Senator Baker, was the ultimate institution man, wasn’t he? He almost grew up in the institution. I don’t think of him as a partisan, I think of him as collegial.

VASTINE: Oh, definitely! I think, yes, I would definitely say that. And I think I may have indicated earlier that he was criticized for that. Because when we took over he was less harsh on the infrastructure of the Rules Committee. Staff and others who should have been “kicked out.” You know, who were real Democrats and just going to lie in wait until they can get us. Get us and kick us out. Prevail again. And, of course, they did. [laughs]

Listen, I better go.

RITCHIE: Okay, can we. . .

VASTINE: But, it's been fun. I was telling Liz earlier that I was looking forward to having this hour and a half with you today because it's been such a stressful day, and I know that if I came over here and did this I couldn't possibly be reached by phone or even think about anything else. So, thank you for this respite.

RITCHIE: Good. Can we schedule another respite?

VASTINE: Yes. We can probably do it for Friday. Do me a favor and hang on to this [transcript] for awhile. I'm building up this big stack and I'm so busy with my job. It's so hard to get a moment.

RITCHIE: Well, they read very well. I think there is a nice flow to the whole story, so don't worry about it.

End Interview #6