

William F. Hildenbrand

Secretary of the Senate, 1981-1985

Secretary to the Minority, 1974-1981

Administration Assistant to Senator Hugh Scott, 1969-1974

Assistant to Senator J. Caleb Boggs, 1961-1969

Interview #7: Secretary of the Senate

(Monday, May 6, 1985)

Interviewed by Donald A. Ritchie

Ritchie: Did you work at all in the 1980 election?

Hildenbrand: In the [Reagan](#) presidential campaign? Uhh-uhh.

Ritchie: Did you stay out of presidential politics after you became Republican secretary?

Hildenbrand: Yes. Nobody wanted me to do anything, so I didn't bother, in either '76 or in '80. That is, I wasn't actively involved in the campaigns.

Ritchie: There's a story that the night before the election of 1980 you put a note on the [Secretary of the Senate's](#) door saying, "Under New Management."

Hildenbrand: "Opening Under New Management."

Ritchie: Is that true?

Hildenbrand: It was before that. It was in October. Stan [Kimmit] as Secretary of the Senate is ex-officio and secretary-general to the Association of Secretary-Generals of the parliaments throughout the world, as I was when I became secretary. It's a position that the secretary holds. He went on a fall Interparliamentary

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Union meeting to some funny land. He always took Gail Martin with him and some of the other people. I talked to Nordy Hoffman, who then was the [sergeant-at-arms](#), and I said, "You know, what I ought to do is get a sign made, and put a sign on his door so that when he comes back it will say: Closed, Opening Under New Management November 4th," or whatever the day after the election was. Nordy thought that was a great idea, so he had somebody in his sign shop make the sign. We went in a couple of nights before Stan got back, he came back on a weekend, and we'd been up Thursday or Friday and put that sign on his door. He always closed his door to his office, so we put the sign on his door. He came back, and we knew that he would go into his office as soon as he came back, which was

Saturday, and he did indeed come into the office. He found the sign. We didn't realize that we were being prophetic at the time that we put the sign there. He didn't think it was very funny even then, and thought less of it after it happened. But Nordy and I thought it was a pretty funny story.

Ritchie: So you really weren't optimistic before the election?

Hildenbrand: No. We had what, forty-three I think, so we were looking at eight seats, or seven seats and a tie. We could see where we could get fairly close. We were thinking forty-seven or fortyeight, pick up five seats, something like that. But I don't think it

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ever dawned on anybody that we would do what we did. I don't think also that we realized that Reagan was going to run as strong, or that Carter was going to be as weak as he was.

Ritchie: Do you recall your feelings on election night, as the news started coming in?

Hildenbrand: I was drunk for two days. Those were some of the funny stories of that campaign. When I left, which was, oh, 3:30 or 4:00, I guess, in the morning, I was well in my cups by that time. We still had not gotten the majority. We were still short. [\[Mack\] Mattingly](#) was still out; [John East](#) was still out; [\[Jeremiah\] Denton](#) was still out. Those three were still out, and I think somewhere else there were some that were not resolved. So I went home in my drunken stupor and got into bed. At about 7:30 the phone rang, and I'd only been in bed about two hours by that time. It was [Baker](#), saying that we had captured the majority and to come back in. So I got up and showered and dressed and came back in -- and continued to drink throughout that day and into the next. It was Thursday before I was sober enough to realize what had happened. But it was quite a surprise.

Ritchie: Do you attribute that shift strictly to Reagan's coattails?

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Hildenbrand: Well, yes. We'll know this time how much of it was Reagan's coattails, and how much of it was individuals. It's the situation that the Republicans find themselves in in '86, and that is the numbers were working our way, and that coupled with the strong candidacy of Ronald Reagan -- he appealed to people. I think that he made a difference in those key races where it was close, that we really should not have won under ordinary circumstances, like Mack Mattingly in Georgia, and like Jeremiah Denton in Alabama, like John East.

Those were races we had no business winning. But with Reagan going as strong as he did, I think it made the difference in those races. That's the one problem that the Democrats have in '86. They don't have anybody at the top of the ticket that's going to help them pull those people in. They're going to have to do it on their own. It's not going to be as easy as they thought that is was going to be, four or five months ago.

Ritchie: How did the Senate Republicans shift from twenty-six years of being in the minority to suddenly being in the majority?

Hildenbrand: Not very easily. You have to remember that there was no one in the Republican ranks (except [Strom Thurmond](#), who was a Democrat when he was in the majority last), there was no Republican who had ever been in the majority. The closest was [John Tower](#), and he didn't come here until May of '61. Nobody ever remembered what it was like to be in the majority. Mark Trice was gone, everybody that

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was here at that time was gone. We had no idea what it was we were supposed to do. We had been the minority long enough and had watched the majority operate long enough so that we pretty well knew what was expected of us, in terms of continuing the operation of this institution, but nobody had ever been a chairman of a committee. It was quite traumatic for an awful lot of people.

I was lucky in that Stan Kimmitt, my predecessor, and I had been friends for ten to twelve years by that time. So the transition from my standpoint was an easy transition, plus the fact that I'd been in the Senate since 1961, so I knew the Senate offices, because I'd worked in them, and I knew the leadership and the support staffs of the sergeant-at-arms and things like that, because I'd been in the leadership and on the floor. So I did not have the problems that some of the other people had in turning over from minority to majority. Where you had good relationships -- Banking, for example, between Danny Wall and Ken McClain, they just switched over, and it was an easy transition for them, because they were good friends and they'd worked together and it wasn't very hard. But in those committees where there was a lot of friction and a lot of partisanship, it was a very difficult transition for them to make. You have to decide who you keep, and who do you let go.

The problem that I had with my conservative members was that they wanted me to fire everybody, because that's the way they did it

twenty-six years ago. Well, a lot had happened in twenty-six years, and the secretary's office and the sergeant-at-arms office was not anywhere near the kind of an office it was in 1953 and '54. Both Liebengood and I went into the jobs with the decision that we were going to do whatever we thought was best for the Senate as a whole because we thought, and still do, that it would reflect on Howard Baker as the majority leader. So we made very few changes. We were called to a meeting with the chairman of the conference, Jim McClure, who wanted us to do something else. We just said there's no way we're going to do anything more than what we're doing. It died down, and that was the end of it, at that particular time. But there are still an awful lot of people who felt that I should have cleaned house, as it were, in the secretary's office.

Ritchie: Well, it was certainly a testament to the idea of a professional, nonpartisan staff. They'd been talking about it for a generation, but there hadn't been a change in party to test it.

Hildenbrand: Yes, well [Frank] Valeo, I think, started it when he was secretary. Then the [John] Culver Commission came along and they recommended, if you remember, the creation of a "super administrator" over both the sergeant-at-arms and the secretary, but the net effect of what the Culver Commission was really saying was exactly what Valeo was trying to do, and that was professionalize the staff. Then Kimmitt continued that. The problem that Republicans had was that

the decision to professionalize was made when you had all Democrats in those positions. The obvious reason for that was that we hadn't been in power for twenty-six years, so there wasn't anything else but Democrats. And also, I don't know even to this day how many of those people who are in those positions are really Democrats versus Republicans. The executive clerk, for example, is a Republican. He was appointed by [Margaret Chase Smith](#). Kimmitt gave him the job, and didn't have to, but moved him up, which is a sign of the professionalism that Stan wanted to have, and that I wanted to have.

Ritchie: It's still a strange world up here: there's no civil service, there's no tenure, everybody wonders from Congress to Congress.

Hildenbrand: Yes, there's no protection. And, you know, with a new secretary coming in, there were people who were let go. There's no protection; there's nobody you can go to. If you are a Democrat, and it's obvious that you are -- and I had some that worked for Kimmitt that had never been anything but Democrats -

- so you say, "I'm sorry, but your time is up." There's not very much that they can do. Try to find a job someplace else. But that's the nature of the political beast.

Ritchie: With a Republican administration coming in in '81, and with the Republicans taking a majority in the Senate, with all the committee positions, there was a lot of patronage to go around.

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Hildenbrand: Yes, and there weren't very many places for Democrats to go, if they were taken out of their jobs in either the committees or in one of the support staffs. They didn't have the administration, and there weren't very many places for them to go.

Ritchie: I wondered about the period between the election and the inauguration, and the types of planning that went on. With Senator Baker looking ahead to being majority leader, what kinds of concerns did he have, and how did he begin to take the lead as a majority rather than a minority leader?

Hildenbrand: I don't know that he had a lot of concerns. He'd been minority leader for four years, and he'd been a very faithful minority leader in terms of his being on the floor throughout those four years. Except for that ill-fated presidential race in 1980, he was there almost every day. I guess in '78 he ran for reelection, so he was down in Tennessee a little bit during that period, but even then he did not have to go that much, and it was a quick trip down and a quick trip back. So he had spent an awful lot of time on the floor learning how to be minority leader. It wasn't that big of a transition for him to switch over to be majority leader.

He spent a lot of time in familiarizing himself with the rules, and with the procedures, because [Byrd](#) was and is a master of Senate rules. Baker knew that he was going to have to know those rules backwards and forwards because Byrd would call him to task at every

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opportunity -- and as it turned out, that's exactly what Byrd did. Byrd did it long enough until he finally realized that Baker was conversant with the rules, and he did know the rules, and then he stopped. Then they became fairly good friends again, but there was a period of time when he went out of his way to try to embarrass Howard Baker as the majority leader, by calling on the rules.

Ritchie: It was sort of a testing period?

Hildenbrand: Uhh-huh, exactly. And I don't fault him for that. He's there to protect his people, and if he can gain the upper hand by those kind of things, there's nothing illegal or wrong about it, or immoral, or anything else, it's the way a good leader should work. But for those of us who were close to Howard Baker, we felt that it was an embarrassment that really should not have been. If you look at it in retrospect, and think about it, we would have done the same thing had the roles been reversed. And I think Byrd and Baker are very, very close friends, and have such a total respect for one another. I'm sure that Bob Byrd misses Howard Baker now.

Ritchie: Did Baker have the parliamentarian coach him on how to proceed?

Hildenbrand: Yes. I had made a decision at the time, because of the problems that the parliamentarian, Murray Zweben, had gotten into with some of the conservatives on our side of the aisle, it was

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obvious to me that that was one of the positions I was going to have to change. I told Stan that he should tell Murray that I was going to have to do that. I wanted to make as few changes as possible, but I knew that I needed to make some visible changes so that my members could see that there had been changes. Murray was just someone that visibly my people, rightly or wrongly, felt was very, very Democratic, with a big "D." They wanted him changed, so I made the change. Bob Dove helped Howard Baker in getting up to speed on the rules.

Ritchie: I remember that Murray had entered a friend of the court brief in the Taiwan treaty issue, and Senator [Goldwater](#) had been quite annoyed about that.

Hildenbrand: Yes.

Ritchie: Was that the major reason?

Hildenbrand: That was part of it. That was a big reason. I could have never gotten by with leaving him. Goldwater would have been all over my case. But there were other conservatives who felt as strongly as Barry did, for differing reasons. But the conservatives, the [McClures](#) of the world, just felt that they could not get a fair shake from Murray. Murray was in an untenable position. You know, you do what the majority leader wants you to do, and it's very hard to try to be bipartisan in that job.

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Ritchie: Is the parliamentarian really that beholden to the majority leader?

Hildenbrand: Well, he's selected by the secretary of the Senate, who's certainly beholden to the majority leader. If you want to get rid of him, and you've got the votes to do it -- his isn't an elected post, he's there at the pleasure of the secretary.

Ritchie: I wondered in the sense that his role is to interpret the rules. Doesn't the parliamentarian strive to be nonpartisan?

Hildenbrand: Yes. And Murray did too, but if you're on the other side of the aisle, and he gives an interpretation and it's not the one you want, he's partisan. Forget the fact that it's a proper ruling, that doesn't really enter into it. It's not the ruling that you wanted, so therefore it's got to be a partisan rule. I think that that's what a lot of our people felt, that his rulings leaned to favor the Democrats in the Senate.

Ritchie: Well, very early on it became clear that Baker was going to work very closely with the Reagan administration. Baker himself was a candidate for president and, while he was a conservative, he wasn't as conservative as Ronald Reagan was, but he seems to have interpreted his role as majority as the White House's point man on the floor of the Senate, and did it very effectively.

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How do you explain the closeness with which Baker was able to work with the Reagan administration?

Hildenbrand: I don't think that the 1980 campaign had anything to do with anything. There was never animosity between Ronald Reagan and Howard Baker. Everybody was in the race to see who was going to be the candidate for president, and Reagan won, and that was fine. When Baker became leader, you must remember, I call him a "congressional brat," in that he was in the Congress -- his father was a congressman, his mother was a congressman, his father-in-law was the minority leader of the Senate. That's all he knew, was the Congress of the United States. It's like being an army brat, by osmosis you know the things that you're supposed to do.

He set out to be a good majority leader, and he realized that the way to do that was to be as successful with the administration's program as it was possible for him to be. That's what got him the majority leadership, was the Reagan administration's programs, the programs that Reagan espoused if he ever got to be president, that's what got us the majority. You don't throw away a winning hand. Baker was a smart enough politician to realize that Reagan was riding awfully high, and the way to go with him was to ride along with him.

Ritchie: Was there that same sense in the party as a whole? Did he have much trouble holding the other Republicans to the task?

Hildenbrand: No. The first crack out of the box there was, I think, a debt limit vote, early on. It was a crucial vote. It just needed to be done. We had about thirteen conservative Republicans who had never voted to increase the debt limit, and had campaigned as a matter of fact against increasing the debt limit. They were called into Baker's office to talk about what we could do, because the Democrats weren't about to help us. If we were going to pass it, we were going to pass it on our own. Jesse Helms, to his ever-dying credit, and Strom Thurmond, made very, very strong pleas to these people -- to [Charlie Grassley](#), who was one for example who never voted for it in the House -- to vote to increase the debt limit, that it had to be. The point they simply made was, "hey, I'm chairman because he's president. I'm not about to turn my back on him now, simply because I've never voted to increase the debt limit. I'm just going to hold my nose and vote." They put such pressure on those, that when it was over the thirteen of them all voted to increase the debt limit.

Ritchie: I always wondered about that. The Democrats refused to vote until all the Republicans had cast their votes.

Hildenbrand: That's right. But we did the same thing to them, so turnabout was fair play, as far as they were concerned.

Ritchie: But in a sense did that help Republican party unity by forcing them to vote together?

Hildenbrand: No, we knew that. It helped to the degree that we told all of our people that "look, the Democrats are not going to help us. Either we have the votes to pass this, or it's not going to be increased. And then I don't know what we do." They knew that they had to provide the votes. There was no question.

Ritchie: But on one of the first really crucial issues, it was the party standing together that counted.

Hildenbrand: Oh, yes. The Democrats are in the same boat now. They're getting now where we were, in that after this farm credit vote, when they stood together, they are now looking for ways in which they can continue to stay together. If Byrd is smart, he'll manufacture those ways, if he has to, in order to get those people used to that syndrome of voting as a party and as a bloc. Because you can't just do it on one vote. You have to keep going back and letting them do it again until they get used to it.

Ritchie: And chipping off enough of the majority to make the difference.

Hildenbrand: Yes, see they don't need that many. They've got forty-seven of their own votes. They only need four votes. With our people, the situation the Republicans are in now, with twenty-two of them running for reelection, some of them who are not running are mavericks anyway, so it's not hard to find four votes. [Bob Dole's](#)

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job is much more difficult than Bob Byrd's, at the moment, even though he's majority leader.

Ritchie: Early on in that Congress, the decision was made to put the budget on the fast track and to concentrate on that to the exclusion of almost everything else. Who made that decision?

Hildenbrand: [Pete Domenici](#) and Howard Baker, with [David Stockman](#). We met at Howard Baker's house on a Sunday, I guess, before we made the decision to do this, with Stockman, and Jim Baker, and Ed Meese, and [Michael] Deaver, [Donald] Regan, who was then treasury secretary, Domenici, [Hatfield](#). People who were going to be involved in the whole thing, devised the strategy to get this budget moving along the lines that we wanted it to move.

Ritchie: Did the idea come from the Congress or the administration?

Hildenbrand: It was the Congress. The administration didn't have any idea about procedures or how to get things like this done. Domenici really, he and Hatfield were the strong people that understood the budget process. Domenici had learned at the feet of [Henry Bellmon](#) -- he and [Muskie](#) were really the architects of the budget process -- so Pete had learned his lessons well, and knew pretty well how they wanted to proceed. He knew the Budget Act backwards and forwards.

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Ritchie: And they were able to come up with the scheme of the Reconciliation bill as the major vehicle.

Hildenbrand: Because we had the votes to do that. It would have been difficult if you didn't have the votes to do that. But in looking at it, in order to formulate the kind of a budget that they wanted, that was of course the way to do it. They needed the chairmen's support because it treads a lot on the chairmen's prerogatives in reconciliation, it doesn't give you much latitude. But everybody was convinced that the economic health of this country was so important that they had to do whatever it was to get it started. They believed enough in Reagan to go ahead and do this, because they thought that he was right. Two years or so

later there was an awful lot of gnashing of teeth, because we weren't quite so sure that the whole thing was going to work. Interest rates got way up into the seventeens and eighteens, and we could see where maybe we had made a big mistake. But, as it turned out, he was right. It all leveled itself out to where we are now.

Ritchie: Can you recall the atmosphere of that meeting in January of 1981? Were people apprehensive about the way things were going? Were they confident? Did they think they could get what they wanted?

Hildenbrand: Yes, I think that they were. I don't know that they were confident, but I think that everybody was willing to go

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ahead and assume the responsibility that was required to get this done. They all believed that if they stayed together that they could do it. It was sort of euphoric, because they were a majority party for the first time, and they believed that that would carry them, that it would be hard for somebody now to vote against them, on the Republican side, because you didn't want them to be a majority party.

Ritchie: On the other hand, the current budget is having troubles. Within the budget there are so many different factions that have their own particular needs in getting it through.

Hildenbrand: But you can't equate '85 with '81. You've got, first of all, a lame duck president; you've got a total new Republican leadership, from majority leader all the way down through. The Democrats are becoming united, for the first time. It's a different atmosphere, it's a different attitude. You've got twenty-two Republicans running in 1986. The Democrats believe that they can take back control; they're not going to help at all. So it's a different situation. And you're dealing at it from a standpoint of deficit reduction, which is not really where we started in '81, that's not where we were, but that's where they are now. So there's a different emphasis than there was then.

Ritchie: There was some concern in '81 about the potential deficits. Wasn't it Howard Baker who referred to the "magic asterisk" in David Stockman's figures?

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Hildenbrand: Oh, we knew about the deficit, but it wasn't as big an issue as it is now. We did not believe then, and as it turned out we were right, that the average person out in the street understood deficits -- because he can't see it, he can't feel it, he can't smell it. It just doesn't affect him. So to go out and try to make a deficit an issue in a campaign, the guy doesn't know what you're talking about. But

because we've continued to build on that deficit, and it became more and more in the news through the last four or five years, in this last campaign it became obvious that the people, while they may not understand it, don't like it. So that's why there's this emphasis on deficit reduction that wasn't there then. We knew about deficits, and we knew they were bad, but they weren't causing problems for anybody, except the economic purists. So we didn't mess with them.

Ritchie: Republicans had campaigned against deficits for a long time.

Hildenbrand: Oh, yes. A lot of the things that we did when we became the majority party, a lot of our members had to go home and go to confession, because they were doing things that in all of their political life they had never done before -- but then, of course, they had never been a majority party before. But anything economic, deficits, increasing taxes, debt limit, all those things, were an anathema to Republican conservatives generally. Then they found

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themselves in bed with the likes of the [Lowell Weickers](#) and the Mark Hatfields of the world, and it caused them all sorts of problems. But they believed in Reagan and that was another thing that helped, that he was their man and if that's what he wanted, they were going to do it.

Ritchie: Reagan came to the Capitol on a couple of occasions, and went to the President's Room. Did Senator Baker suggest that to him?

Hildenbrand: Yes. We did that on inauguration day. Baker was somewhat of a historian about the Senate, but really not that much, but he realized the value of the President's Room and what it had stood for and why it had been there. It had never been used as long as I can remember for anything like that. Lyndon Johnson came up there I think one time to sign something, I don't remember what it was. But he recommended that what the president ought to do, on his very first act, was to go into the President's Room and sign some nomination forms for his cabinet. So after he was sworn in as president, he came from the platform into the President's Room, and he signed the letters appointing his cabinet, and then gave them to the Vice President of the United States, who was then the [President of the Senate](#). He came up about maybe twice after that. I know there was a meeting with [Tip O'Neill](#)

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and [Jim Wright](#) and our leadership on economic problems that was held in the President's Room. So he was there at least a couple of times that I remember.

Ritchie: Was Senator Baker suggesting ways for President Reagan to effectively lobby for his program, or was the administration pretty well geared up for that sort of thing?

Hildenbrand: Oh, no. Baker wanted them to do this because he wanted them to see the relationship between the administration and the Congress, that it was going to be a two-way street, that we were going to go back and forth. We didn't have to go down there all the time, that he could come up here just as easily as having us go down there. He believed that it was important for everybody to see that in the very beginning, that there was going to be a relationship between the White House and the Congress, and certainly the White House and the Senate.

Ritchie: How would you compare Reagan as opposed to his predecessors in terms of his dealings with Congress?

Hildenbrand: Well, he was not a political animal. His instincts were so good. He didn't have the ego that his predecessors had had. It was not hard for him to come up on the Hill. He took the word of Howard Baker; Howard Baker was his leader. So if Howard Baker said "we ought to go and do this," he said "we'll go do that."

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He didn't have people saying, "oh, don't do that. Show them who's boss," and all this kind of business. He is very, very amenable to those kind of things, and was always available if Howard Baker wanted to talk to him about anything.

Ritchie: Did Baker have a direct line to the White House?

Hildenbrand: Yes. He did not use it as much as some others might have used it. He had a lot of respect for Jim Baker, and he went through Jim Baker because he knew that his views would be going into the Oval Office through Jim Baker. But there were times when he realized that he really had to talk to the president, and he had no difficulty in getting through to him. Nobody said, "Can I tell him what it's all about," or anything like that. They either put him through, or they said the president will call you back.

Ritchie: Considerably different from Scott in the Nixon years.

Hildenbrand: Yes.

Ritchie: What about Reagan's congressional liaison? How would you rate that?

Hildenbrand: They reflect -- and I think this is true to some extent, liaison people have a tendency to reflect the boss of the agency, or in this case the President of the United States. If you

have a president who wants to get along with the Congress, then your job becomes very easy because that's what you're going to do, and that's what they did. I think that they did exceptionally well in that regard. They were not the heavy hitters that a Bryce Harlow was, or a Mike Manatos was, or a Kenny O'Donnell was, but nevertheless they were good journeymen liaison people. They could bring the message of the White House to the leaders. The leader used Jim Baker an awful lot, although he recognized how important it was to go through the liaison people, and did, as often as he could. In fact, we have chairmen's meeting at 11:45 on Tuesdays, and he invited the White House liaison to sit in on that, which was unheard of, because that was an internal thing where we used to scream and holler a lot. But he asked the White House liaison to sit in on it.

Ritchie: Did that help, do you think?

Hildenbrand: Oh, I don't think it hurt. The thing that I like about it simply is that sitting as a liaison officer, I can get a sense of the deepness of the feeling of members if I'm in that room, moreso than I can if somebody just tells me about it. I can feel the intensity in that room that I can't get by Baker just calling me up and saying, "Man, we had a meeting and it was terrible." That doesn't really do much for me. But if I'm sitting there and listening to Lowell Weicker scream, or Strom Thurmond, or John Tower, or Mark Hatfield, I'm better able to say to the President of the United

States, "I mean, these guys are mad. I don't care what anybody else tells you, they are mad." You don't know that unless you sit there, so I think from their standpoint it was a good thing for them. And it was good from our standpoint because it got the message to the White House.

Ritchie: Now, when you say that people were mad, these were sessions where chairmen had to decide who was getting attention, who's bills would get to the floor?

Hildenbrand: Oh, I wasn't talking specifics, I was just raising the question does it help them, and I said yes, it helps them because of the intensity of feeling that they can get in the room.

Ritchie: I was just curious as to what types of things that they would discuss that would raise those emotions?

Hildenbrand: Oh, they would discuss legislation, and they would discuss programs the administration had sent up. They would discuss whether or not

they had the votes to pass them. They would discuss whether there were problems, what kind of problems, where were the problems coming from. You know, all of those chairmen did not necessarily go lockstep with everything the administration wanted to do. The fact that Bob Packwood might report it out didn't necessarily mean that Strom Thurmond was going to embrace it, just because it was a Republican chairman. So you had some people in there with some

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very strong feelings about things that they weren't going to change just because a Republican chairman proposed it.

Ritchie: The other really remarkable thing about that year was that Senator Baker was able to put off social issues until after the budget issues were taken care of. It seems to me that that was a critical decision, and it was pretty amazing that he carried it off. How did he manage that?

Hildenbrand: Well, he just sat down with the people that had the social issues and said, "hey, look, you're going to get your day. I'm going to give you time to debate this issue." Abortion, for example, was one that Jesse was always pushing him for, or prayer in the schools, or busing. He just flat told them, "I'm committed to you that before a certain day" -- whatever that day was, I don't recall the dates now -- "I'm going to have a bill on the floor and you're going to be able to debate the issue of abortion," or whatever it is. And they all went along. They believed Howard Baker's word. If Howard Baker said they're going to have the chance to do this, they believed they were going to have a chance to do it, and they did. He felt very, very strongly about giving his word and keeping it. He would have done most anything in order to keep that word. People said, "Well, you don't have to bring this up." He said, "Yes, I do. I made that commitment." That's how he managed to hold off all the issues until we'd disposed of the budget issue.

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Ritchie: Considering how emotional those issues had been in the campaign just before then, and in so many people's careers, it had to take a lot of willpower on their part not to bring them up.

Hildenbrand: Yes, and in some cases it was hard for them to explain to their constituencies, particularly lobbying groups, as to why they weren't pushing for this. They didn't care about the budget, what the hell was the budget as far as they were concerned. Abortion was key to them. So it was difficult for the Jesse Helmses of the world to take that position and stay off of those issues. We tried as

much as possible to give them an out of some sort so that they could sort of blame us, while at the same time acquiescing to what we were doing.

Ritchie: Did anybody give you any particular trouble?

Hildenbrand: No. The lobby groups did, but the members didn't give us any trouble.

Ritchie: Then after scoring a huge success on the budget issue, most all of those social issues were stalemated, they never did pass abortion, or school prayer.

Hildenbrand: Which is what we knew when we started in the first instance. We just didn't want them up at that particular time. You know, these were not issues that were suddenly new, that nobody had ever heard of before. We'd been dealing with busing for as long as I

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can remember. And while abortion was a relatively new issue, it was still six, seven years we'd been messing with that. Prayer in the school the same way. These were not new issues. We knew where the votes were all along, in terms of how difficult it was going to be to pass any of those things, which is another reason why Baker didn't want to mess with them until he got the budget out of the way, because they'd just have a tendency to stalemate everything and tie up the Senate, for something that's not going to be enacted anyway.

Ritchie: And in fact, Republicans fought against them as well as supporting them. Senator Weicker and Senator Packwood really led the

Hildenbrand: Fight against abortion, and had been for years before that, so that was nothing new.

Ritchie: We talked about liaison when we talked about the budget, I wondered if you could tell me what you thought about David Stockman's role in all of this, and how effective or ineffective he was in that early period of getting things launched?

Hildenbrand: Well, David probably memorized that budget, knew it better and still does than anybody else. He had a tendency to rub people the wrong way, and to be maybe a little arrogant, certainly very dogmatic in his positions, unbending. But he had a way to go, and that's the way he wanted to go. You just had to beat him down to

get to the point -- and sometimes they went over his head and would go to Baker and go the president and say, "you know, damn it, this is not going to work. Get him to back off." There were many, many compromises. But Stockman was liked one day and hated the next. It all depended on what day it happened to be.

Ritchie: Did it help his position that he had been a House member before?

Hildenbrand: No.

Ritchie: He knew the way the Congress worked perhaps better than if he had come from outside?

Hildenbrand: No, David is an intellectual to the nth degree and probably didn't understand how the Congress worked anyway, even though he'd been in the Congress. He was much more of a substance man than he was anything else.

Ritchie: I wondered if that magazine article that came out on him, "The Education of David Stockman," affected his relationships with people up here?

Hildenbrand: Not really. There were some that took great delight in the article, and other's it didn't matter. These people in this fishbowl are used to stories and articles. If you're strong enough and in a strong enough position, why you can roll with those

articles and they won't bother you too much. Members have a tendency -- they're one-day stories and they chortle about them, but two weeks later nobody will remember what the thing was all about.

Ritchie: It doesn't tend to undermine a person's credibility?

Hildenbrand: No. It raised questions that may not have been there before, but he's still here and that says something, I guess.

Ritchie: The election of 1980 brought in a whole new class of Republican senators, more than a dozen

Hildenbrand: Sixteen.

Ritchie: One of the largest Republican classes in a generation. Were there any particular problems in dealing with that many freshmen senators?

Hildenbrand: Well, it was a big class, a bigger class than we were used to. There were eighteen new members that came in: two Democrats and sixteen Republicans. We weren't used to dealing with that big of a class. But it didn't make any difference to us one way or the other. It would have made a difference if they could have suddenly decided they all wanted to get together and be a bloc. That caused us a little concern in the outset. We got to thinking about it. We had nothing on which to base it, we just sort of thought, if

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those guys suddenly decide that they're that big of a group, which they are, and they decide that they want to have a major impact on this whole place, they could do it, because that's a lot of votes, sixteen is what twenty percent maybe, or maybe more than that. But as it turned out they never got into that kind of a category.

Ritchie: Well, did Senator Baker make any overtures to them so that they wouldn't feel they were being left out?

Hildenbrand: One of the things he did with the chairmen's meeting, he invited a freshman member each week, a different freshman member each week, to come to the chairmen's meetings, so that they became a part of the system and they began to understand what went on in the chairmen's meeting, and how people managed bills and things like that. He went out of his way to make sure that they knew what was happening, so that they weren't treated lightly. By bringing them into those councils like that, why he made it possible for them to enter their pleas for something, or not for something. Also it gave the rest of the members, that is the other fifteen or sixteen, a chance to say to someone, "you're going to the chairmen's meeting, how about raising this or raising that." And then I think that those members went back and talked to the other members and brought them up to date on what was happening. It was impossible to get all of them in there, so that was the system that he devised to keep them informed, to bring a different one in each week.

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Ritchie: Did he have any difficulties in placing people on committees, keeping everyone happy, all those freshmen members?

Hildenbrand: We do a different deal than the Democrats do. The Democrats do it by the majority leader, or the minority leader as the case may be. He just does it with the steering committee, which is his steering committee. We don't do that. We have a committee on committees and we go strictly on seniority. In some cases that's better, because then you don't have the people clawing and screaming

at you if you don't give them the assignment they want. It's by seniority and that's it, we don't make any changes.

Ritchie: Did the Republican Policy Committee play much of a role in the early years of being in the majority?

Hildenbrand: No. No more so than they had in the minority.

Ritchie: They were just drawing up position papers rather than plotting strategy?

Hildenbrand: Mmm-hmm. That was not their role, never has been.

Ritchie: We talked before about the way that Senator Scott and Senator Baker used the leadership in the minority position, did anything change when you went into the majority?

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Hildenbrand: No. Except that we now had committee chairmen to consider. So we had a tendency to have meetings that were larger than just the leadership. It was hard to have just leadership meetings when you had committee chairmen that were involved. Depending on what the issue was, you'd have the leadership and then you'd have a couple of chairmen, because it was their issue.

Ritchie: Senator Baker was on the floor a lot. I can remember going in and seeing him most of the time, it seemed. What did he use Senator [Stevens](#) for, as his whip?

Hildenbrand: He didn't really use Senator Stevens that much for anything, except for times when he wasn't going to be there, or if he had to leave and he wanted Ted to close. Ted was always in the meetings. He knew what was going on all the time. We used to meet at 9:00 every morning, senior staff meeting, and Ted was always invited to that. He knew as much as everybody else knew about what was going on, or we tried to at least make sure that he did. But Baker wanted to make sure that he knew that floor as well as anybody else, and the way to do it was to be there. And that's what he did. He liked the floor, he liked to be there. Unlike Scott, who did not like the floor, and didn't want to mess with it; it was beneath him, almost. So there wasn't much for Ted to do.

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Ritchie: Is there much problem in terms of scheduling things on the floor? You've got all those chairmen coming together, does each one of them want their major bill out next? How do you keep them all happy?

Hildenbrand: That's the biggest problem, I think, that a leader has, the daily scheduling. It's getting worse all the time. Twenty years ago they didn't have whip notices, or they didn't have scheduling things, the leadership decided this bill was coming up and it came up, and nobody voiced any complaints or said "no, I can't take it up, I'm not going to be here," or this, that, or the other thing. Now you have to almost clear with a hundred senators what you're going to take up, because if somebody can't be here, or doesn't want to be here, or doesn't want to take it up at this time, then they get into a case of -- you know, it takes unanimous consent or something and they say "no, I'm not going to give you unanimous consent." The place runs now by unanimous consent more than it ever did before. Twenty years ago we didn't know what unanimous consent was.

Ritchie: The idea of a senator putting a "hold" on a bill, is that something new?

Hildenbrand: Well, new in the last ten years, if that's new. I don't remember it back in the early days when I was with Scott, when he was first minority leader, we had in those days a calendar committee which used to look at all the bills and say these can go or these

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we ought to take a look at, or something like that. But the business of putting holds on legislation was not what it is now. Now, every time you turn around somebody sends a letter that says I want to hold this bill. I'm sure every bill on the calendar has got a hold on it from someplace.

Ritchie: Well, how do you deal with it?

Hildenbrand: You deal with by simply, when the time comes that you're going to take it up, you just call the people that have holds and say, "I'm very sorry, but the bill's coming up tomorrow." There is nothing in the rules, a hold has no status unless the leadership gives it status. It doesn't mean anything unless the leadership decides that it means something.

Ritchie: It's more of a signal

Hildenbrand: It's a courtesy.

Ritchie: But it means that potentially that person could object to a unanimous consent agreement.

Hildenbrand: Yes, because sometimes when they send us the letter and put a hold on it, they don't tell us why they want that hold. So we don't know if they're opposed to the legislation, whether they just have a speech that they want to give, whether they've got an amendment that they want to offer, all of those things we don't know

unless the letter tells us. So we have to check at the time we're ready to take it up and find out what their interest in it is.

Ritchie: And who keeps track of all of that?

Hildenbrand: The secretary of the majority, Howard Greene and his staff. All the hold letters, so called, go to Howard Greene's office. They keep the calendar, and they mark the calendar that says who has holds, so that every time you say, "we're going to take this bill up," you can look at the calendar and you know who you have to talk to before you can do it.

Ritchie: Do you suspect that many of these holds are coming from staff rather than from senators?

Hildenbrand: Oh, yes, no question about it. Many, many times we'd get a letter, and we'd see the senator in the cloakroom and we'd say, "why do you want to hold this bill?" And he wouldn't have the vaguest idea what we were talking about. Had no idea. But they'll support their staffs, till they find out. Many times we'd appraise the senator and he'd say, "I don't have any idea, let me call my office," so he'd call his office and then he'd come back and say, "Oh, yeah, blah, blah, blah, blah." Then we'd know what it was.

Ritchie: Has the increase in staff really complicated work on the floor, work in the Senate?

Hildenbrand: I think so, and I've thought so for quite some time. I'm sure that I'm not alone in that. I think it's complicated the life of a member. I think the number of committees that a member has, and the number of subcommittees that a member now has is directly related to the size of staffs. If you didn't have as many staff people as you have, you wouldn't have all the committees, because you wouldn't need to, you wouldn't be on everything that you could lay your hands on. Each staff person decides that you ought to be an agricultural expert, or some other kind of an expert, so he pushes you to go that way. So the first thing you know you're trying to get on the Agriculture Committee and you haven't got a farm in your whole state. I don't think there's any question that staff has played a major role in the way this institution has changed. Certainly it can no longer be considered as a thinking man's body, the "greatest deliberative body in the world," because it sure isn't any longer. Nobody deliberates anymore.

Ritchie: Is that also because the schedule has gotten so crowded?

Hildenbrand: Not the floor schedule, the member's schedule! The last place he wants to go is on the floor. If we paid members on the amount of time they went on the floor, they wouldn't make very much money. They just have so many other things pulling at them: committee meetings, constituencies, the need to go out and raise

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money for campaigning, the need to go out and make speeches to supplement their income, which is not that much. If you look at the salaries of chairmen of the boards and then you look at these members making seventy-three, or whatever it is, thousand dollars with a \$300 billion budget, or whatever the heck it is that we're dealing with, it's sort of ludicrous.

Ritchie: Was that perhaps one of the motivations behind Senator Baker's desire to have television in the chamber, to make it more attractive for members to be there on the floor?

Hildenbrand: I don't know that he ever thought that was a possibility. I think he just thought that the American people had a right to know what was happening on the floor of the Senate. If members didn't want to come over and there was an empty chamber with two people talking, so be it. But that didn't get around the point that he believed that sitting in Ottumwa, Iowa, in your kitchen, you had a right to know what was happening on the floor of the Senate, as you had the right to know what's happening on the floor of the House.

Ritchie: Why do you think he was unsuccessful in getting television in the chamber?

Hildenbrand: There were just forces on the other side of the issue that did not want it -- [Russell Long](#), [Wendell Ford](#), some of the others that did not want to see TV -- and you must remember, Russell

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Long was here back in the days when the Senate really was a great deliberative body. It's hard to get over the fact of what it once was. This was just another step in the direction of doing away with the Senate as a meaningful institution in our government.

Ritchie: He just never felt he had the votes to get it through?

Hildenbrand: Never felt he had the votes. Plus the fact that it was always difficult for him, there was always something else that needed to be dealt with, something that was important. TV in the Senate was not going to bring down the

rafters anyplace in this country. So it was hard to find time to debate it the length that was going to be needed to debate it in order to try to be successful.

Ritchie: In that first year, a problem arose in the Foreign Relations Committee when Senator Helms objected to a series of appointments. There was a lot of criticism at the time of Senator [Percy](#), when he was chairman of the committee, and also of Senator Baker as majority leader, for allowing these nominations not to come up for such a long period of time. Was there anything that Senator Baker as majority leader could have done to facilitate the president's appointments going through that he didn't do, or was there any reason why he kept out of that dispute for so long?

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Hildenbrand: Well, no. The nominations are referred to the committee and the committee has the right to act or not to act. We would allow the chairman to go ahead at his own pace. If we were under great pressure from the administration to take action, as the leadership, then we would just simply call the chairman and say, "We don't care whether you report him favorably or unfavorably or whatever it is, but the role of the committee is to report that nomination to the floor." The Constitution says the Senate will advise and consent, it doesn't say the committee will advise and consent, so you don't have a right to just keep that there. If you want to vote it down, then that's something else again, but just not to do anything at all isn't the way that this ought to be. On some occasions I think we even discharged the committee in order to get them up on the calendar where we could bring them up. But it's hard to get a discharge petition. So you have to rely on the responsibility of the committee chairman, that once he finds that either he can't get a vote or he's not sure he's got the votes and he doesn't want to defeat the guy, then the best thing is for him to try to get it out without a vote. In most instances he would have been able to do that. He would have been able to report it without recommendation, or report it disapproved, or report it anyway he wanted to report it.

Ritchie: Considering the position of majority leader and how it's fluctuated in the last twenty years, from a Lyndon Johnson through a Mike Mansfield and a Robert Byrd to a Howard Baker, do you

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think that the position is more powerful than it used to be, less powerful, the same? What direction do you see it going in?

Hildenbrand: I see it going in a direction where the majority is simply going to be a floor leader, and that his whole responsibility will rest in getting legislation enacted, or getting it up and considered and either passed or defeated. He won't

ever again wield the power that a Lyndon Johnson had, for example, simply because the Senate has changed and the people have changed. Lyndon Johnson would get run out of town on a rail in this body as it's constituted now. They would never put up with those kinds of shenanigans.

There's the story that they tell of [Joe Clark](#) from Pennsylvania, who when Lyndon was the leader and Bobby Baker was his chief aid, Joe Clark was in the back of the chamber, he had one of these desks at the very back of the chamber, and he was just railing at the leadership something terrible on some issue which nobody seems to remember. And Bobby Baker went down to Lyndon Johnson and told Lyndon: "You can't let him get away with talking about the leadership like that. You've got to put him in his place." Lyndon said, "You're absolutely right. When this is over, when he's finished, you tell him I want to see him." So when it was over, Baker went to Joe Clark and said, "The leader would like to see you." So Joe went down to the front desk and sat down next to him, and there was a lot of arguing back and forth and waving of arms and hands, and finally Clark got up and

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stalked out. Lyndon turned around to Bobby and motioned to him to come back and said, "You and your smart ideas, he told me to go to hell. Now what do I do?" And that's about where I think that they are now. You can scream at them, but there's nothing you can do to them. If they don't want to do what you want them to do, you can't do much about it.

Ritchie: Did Senator Baker express much frustration about the job?

Hildenbrand: No, not really. I think he sort of liked being the leader. If you recognize the limitations that the job has, then you can live within those limitations. I think that Baker early on realized those limitations. I think he enjoyed being the leader. I think he enjoyed the role that he played. He will always be remembered as the first Republican majority leader in twenty-six years in the Senate of the United States. He will be, I think, recognized as one of the better of the majority leaders that this body has ever had.

Ritchie: At the same time that he was majority leader, you were Secretary of the Senate. I wanted to ask you how your role changed, or if it changed, when you moved from being Republican secretary to Secretary of the Senate?

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Hildenbrand: Well, when I first was approached and asked to be secretary, I said no, because I was afraid that my role would change. I had been a legislative animal all of my life and I did not want to change that. I told Senator Baker, "No,

I want to stay where I am as secretary of the majority. That's what I like to do, and that's what I want to do." He said, "I respect that, and if that's what you want to do, that's fine." So they started a search for somebody to be secretary. A lot of my friends found out what I had done and just called me every name in the book and threatened to have me committed to St. Elizabeth's and all sorts of dire things like that, until finally I realized that it wasn't very smart on my behalf not to be the Secretary of the Senate, which certainly is the capstone of a career in this institution.

So I called Howard Baker at home on a Sunday, and I said, "Have you found anybody to be Secretary of the Senate?" He said no. I said, "Well, what would you think if I reconsidered?" He said, "I'd like to talk to you about it the first thing in the morning." The first thing in the morning we met and I told him that I had thought about it and I'd decided that if he wanted me to be, I would be the secretary. I explained to him my problems, and things that I thought, and he said, "Well, what you don't realize is that as the Secretary of the Senate you can make it anything you want to make it. If you want to spend all your time on the floor, spend it on the floor. Who's going to tell you you can't do that?" So I realized

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the wisdom of what he was telling me, and I said, "okay, I'll go ahead and be the Secretary of the Senate." So he put my name before the caucus, and I became secretary.

Ritchie: Were you able to carry out your desire to be on the floor?

Hildenbrand: Yes, because I was smart enough to hire people or to utilize people who were there in the jobs that they had been doing, and hired people like Marilyn Courtot, who became my assistant secretary, who had an administrative background. That was her strong point. So I left the administration of the secretary's office up to her and I continued to do what I had always done, fool around on the floor, which is what I had wanted to do anyway. My relationship with Marilyn and some of the others was good enough that they would take no action unless they had cleared it through me, so I had no problems in worrying what was going to happen when I wasn't there. But it got me out of the nitty-gritty of having to meet with the department heads and do all those kinds of things, which would have taken up much more time than I really had to spend if I was going to be Baker's righthand man as far as the legislative agenda was concerned.

I was his liaison with the Democrats. I had good relationships in my years as secretary of the minority with most of the Democrats, and I was a good friend of Bob Byrd's and a good friend of Alan

[Cranston's](#) and [John Stennis'](#). So he used me a lot in negotiations when he wanted to find out what the Democrats wanted, or what they were looking for. I would do that for him.

Ritchie: Did you ever get a good sense of what the Democrats wanted in that period?

Hildenbrand: Oh, yes. It was mostly on specific issues. If we were at loggerheads on a given subject or something, you could go to them and find out what would it take for us to be able to get together on something. Sometimes there was no way of getting together. What they wanted was something that we just could not do for them. But at least we knew what we were faced with.

Ritchie: Had the Democrats had a similar type of liaison with the Republicans, when they were in the majority?

Hildenbrand: No. They didn't much care whether we wanted something or didn't want anything. It didn't really make that much difference to them. They always sat there with so many votes that it didn't make any difference.

Ritchie: Having been in the minority for such a long period of time, do you think that made you more sensitive to the minority?

Hildenbrand: At least I knew where they were coming from. I could understand their moods. I could understand their reasons for a

lot of things. I think the new leadership that the Republicans have now, that's causing them some problems because they had never been in the minority leadership and they do not understand how these things work. I think that they are accusing the Democrats of being very partisan, or trying to take over the operation of the Senate, when in effect they're being nothing more than a constructive minority, which we had been for so many years. They're just doing the same things that we did. But if you don't recognize that, it certainly sounds as if they're going to try to take over, which is not the case.

Ritchie: In addition to serving as liaison to the Democrats, what other types of jobs did you do for the majority leader?

Hildenbrand: Oh, just about anything. As I said, we had senior staff meetings every morning and we went over the day's activities and we went over what was coming up and what we were going to do or try to do. We formulated the

positions for chairmen's meetings, the agenda for policy luncheons. Just generally I sort of served as a confidant of Baker, somebody that he could talk to and bounce things off of just to get different reactions. It's a bad individual who allows himself to be placed in a vacuum where he's talking only to himself, because you have a tendency to get the answers that you want. Baker always used staff in such a way; he would raise things and say, "I want to do this." He expected somebody, usually somebody like me, who has a tendency to be disrespectful on occasion, to flat

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out tell him that I thought he was crazy and that was the dumbest idea I had ever heard. But he expected that. At the bottom he might decide to go ahead and do it, no matter what it was you said, but he wanted to make sure that he got some different viewpoints, and some different things that he might not have thought of.

Ritchie: Traditionally the secretary's office has served as a retreat, right off the Senate floor, for members to get away to. Did you have members who would just come in to use it as a place to sit down, put their feet up and relax?

Hildenbrand: Oh, yes. I sent out a letter to all members shortly after I became secretary in which I indicated that I would be opening such a place after 5:00 o'clock in the evenings, when we were in session. If they needed a place to come and be by themselves, or to talk to their colleagues, or whatever it is, to feel free to use my office.

Ritchie: Did you have some who came in regularly?

Hildenbrand: Oh, yes. I have some now who are complaining because they don't have a place to go.

Ritchie: The Senate once had a much more club-like atmosphere, and I guess its harder and harder now for the senators to recreate that, to have a place to unwind, and to get that inner group feeling.

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Hildenbrand: I don't think it's the place so much as it is the make up of the Senate is different. When it was a club, and when it was clubby, you were dealing with men whose family life had gone by. Their children were grown and had gone on and they were now grandfathers. They had no life except the Senate, and so you got together and talked to your friends because that was your life. Now you have the [Dan Quayles](#) of the world who are in their thirties with three children and a wife that's very demanding -- I don't mean that in any disrespectful way, but as wives can be. They don't have the time to be clubby, except when we're in

sessions and they can't go anyplace anyway. But if there's no session, they've got places to go and things to do, and it isn't sitting around with the colleagues.

Ritchie: You said on a number of occasions that personal factors really count in the way a senator votes. Is this lack of clubbiness affecting the way the Senate operates and the way members relate to each other?

Hildenbrand: Yes, I think it is, although the clubbiness now comes about more as a result of committees on which you serve. You get to be clubby with the members that you serve on committees with because you see them more than you see anybody else. But you don't have the free flow of information among the members as you would have

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if they were sitting around having a toddy. To that degree, that's taken something away, because I think that exchange of ideas is always good.

Now you have Wednesday Club, which is the liberal to moderates of the Republican side, who meet on Wednesdays, as the name implies. You have a Steering Committee, which is made up of the conservatives, and they meet. So there's those two clubs within the Republican side of the aisle that at least meet socially once a week. But their ideas are all preordained because they're all conservatives and they're all liberals, so there's not much of an interplay between the two philosophies, although Ted Stevens, to his credit, some years ago decided that they ought to once a month have a joint meeting. So now they have joint luncheons once a month, when the liberals and the conservatives get together at lunch, and that's healthy.

Ritchie: Did Senator Baker use the conference much when he was majority leader?

Hildenbrand: No.

Ritchie: Just formally at the beginning of a session and not much after that?

Hildenbrand: We found that we never could get anything done in conference, because if it was an issue that we felt needed to go to conference, if it was that important, it was also emotional and

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caused all sorts of problems for everybody and you never could get anything resolved. So we got into big harrangues and screams and shouts and hollers and nothing ever happened, we couldn't resolve it.

Ritchie: At the same time that the Senate was showing

remarkable party unity, in the House there was a lot of party divisions, especially among the Democrats where the Boll Weevils and others split off. Was Senator Baker and were the Senate Republicans at all active in working with the House?

Hildenbrand: No.

Ritchie: Or was that strictly the White House liaison?

Hildenbrand: We did not. We did our own thing with whatever it was. Baker and [Michel](#) talked continually, they knew what was going on. But we never tried to get the House members themselves involved. There's no way that they could do anything near what we were doing. We were a majority, they were a minority. It was like apples and oranges.

Ritchie: One of the sources I read said that because Senator Baker was able to keep Republicans united and effectively pass the president's program in the Senate, that that allowed the White House to concentrate on the House. Is that a fair assessment?

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Hildenbrand: I would think so. Yes. They did not certainly have the problems with us that they had with the House. And it also helped, I think, Bob Michel in the House in that it gave him a talking point to the other Republicans, to say, "Hey, you can't let those guys in the Senate do this. You've got to help." So that was just another argument that he could use to try to keep his forces in line: if the Senate could do this, the House should do no less.

Ritchie: It was a very successful strategy.

Hildenbrand: In some instances it worked quite well, yes. I think that Tip O'Neill, the Speaker, was not very happy with the way it turned out over two or three years, I guess, before it began to get unraveled. But he had a difficult time in dealing not only with his own people, but also with a more united party on the Republican side than he was used to having.

Ritchie: After four years as majority leader, Howard Baker decided not to run for reelection. What factors went into his decision not to run in 1984?

Hildenbrand: I think two: I think he was tired and wanted to make some money; and he believed, rightly or wrongly, that you could not run for the presidency from where he was. He had tried that in '80 and it was very unsatisfactory. He still had in the back of his mind that he wanted to be President of the United States, and to stay

here and run for six years, he would still be here when that 1988 election came along, and he just decided that he did not want to do that. And I think also the economic situation was such that he wanted to earn some money. And he'd been here eighteen years and he just wanted some time to be with his wife, and do some of the things that he wanted to do, without having the press of the responsibility of being the leader.

Ritchie: Was there any pressure from the Reagan administration for him to stay on?

Hildenbrand: No. He did it two years ahead of time. He went up and flat out told them that he wasn't going to run. So they knew that far in advance.

Ritchie: At the same time, you decided to retire as Secretary of the Senate.

Hildenbrand: I had been talking about doing something anyway before he made his decision. I don't think I ever would have gone had he not decided to go, even though I had been talking about going. Then when I had my triple bypass operation, why that just was perfect from my standpoint.

Ritchie: The timing was right.

Hildenbrand: The timing was just perfect. He made me very happy when he called me into his office and said, "I've decided to announce that I'm not going to seek reelection." I couldn't have been happier.

Ritchie: Were you surprised at the way the majority leader's race turned out, to succeed Senator Baker?

Hildenbrand: Yes, to some degree, although I'm not so sure why. I think I thought that [Dick Lugar](#) would be a stronger candidate than he was. I certainly believed that when it came down to [Dole](#) and [Stevens](#), if Stevens had that much strength to stay in that long, that he would win. So I think I was surprised that Bob Dole got it. He's told many people that I was opposed to him. I don't know whether he thinks I worked against him or not, but he's wrong, and I've told him that he's wrong. I stayed out of that one just as I stayed out of the others. I got into it to the extent that if somebody asked me, I gave them the answers. [Alan Simpson](#) asked me when he decided he might want to do it, how was the best way to go about doing it. I told him my experiences with Hugh Scott in running those kind of things. [John Chafee](#) talked to me about running for conference chairman. And Lugar talked to me about running for the leader's office. So to that degree I

did give them counsel, but only because they asked. If they asked, I answered. But I didn't work against Bob Dole, contrary to what he might think.

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Ritchie: Did you recommend anything other than going around and seeing people face to face?

Hildenbrand: No, because I still think that's the way to get elected. That's the way Scott did it, and he was successful, and until somebody finds a better way, why I think that's the way to do it. But you have to do that, and you can't let somebody else do it for you. If you want to be leader, want to be it bad enough, you'll take the time to go do those kind of things and not let staff do it and say "I talked to so and so's AA and they're going to be for you." Well, that's no good. You need that commitment face to face.

Ritchie: Well, all told you were with the Congress from 1957 through 1985. Could you give me an overview today about how the institution has changed, what the Senate is today as opposed to what it was when you were started? I guess what I'm angling at is which ways do you think the changes have been positive and which ways do you think they've been negative.

Hildenbrand: I think it's a totally different Congress now than it was thirty years ago, but I'm not so sure that the Congress of thirty years ago could handle the situations that we have today. So I think that probably what we have, as frustrating as it is, is the right kind of a situation for the times. I don't think you can go back to the way that it was. You'll never go back to how it was. I'm not so sure that it would work. In the late '50s and the early

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'60s, television was not yet as strong as it is now. You weren't getting around the country as fast as you're getting around the country now, with the jets that we have. The age of members was different then than it is now. There weren't the lobbying groups that there are now. The demand on members' time was not anywhere near then the way that it is now.

Mark Hatfield, when I testified for the last time before the Appropriations Committee, asked me how we could change things to make them back the way they were. I said the only way you can do that is to start over. You'd have to eliminate the Senate and start it from scratch. There's no way that you can go back. You can't undo all of the things that have been done. That's the problem in the staffing area, in the committees. Dan Quayle tried this last time and succeeded beyond my wildest expectations, cutting down members with three committees. But the only reasons they were all on those committees was because

they had staff on those committees, and they didn't want to lose staff. So as long as you're going to build on staff that way, you're going to continue to have no time to do the kind of things that you ought to do.

You could call the session and require everybody to be on the floor and then lock the doors and not let them go. Then you would get back to where it was thirty years ago, when members would come over on the floor and they'd spend three hours on the floor and that

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was their day, that was all they did. But now, members don't spend three minutes. They're like those trained mice, when the bell rings they come over and vote and then go back. Mice do that, when the bell rings they know it's time to eat. That's the only time members come to the floor, pretty much, unless they're managing a bill.

In the old days, a member came on the floor, he knew exactly what the vote was. He knew exactly what the issue was. He knew exactly what they were voting on. Members walk in that door now and don't have any more idea what's up on the floor of the Senate than they can fly. That's why the leadership on both sides of the aisle have written things down in the well for members to come down and read what the vote is all about. That to many is the first time they know what they're about to vote on. Well, that doesn't lend itself really to what everybody said was the greatest deliberative body in the world -- to have thirty seconds to read something that some staff person has written, and then to have to vote yes or no. These are not issues like we're going to have licorice candy on Saturday, these are arms control and foreign policy decisions and major appropriations for highways and airports and all sorts of things like that, Social Security and things like that. But it's not going to change.

I would venture that if the Democrats take control in two years that the size of committees will go right back up the way they were

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before Quayle got into these things. That's just the way it is. There's no way that you are going to be able to go back to the way that it was. And I'm not so sure that it would work if you did. I've always said that this country was lucky in that every time it was in a crisis there always seemed to be the right person in the presidency to handle that crisis. Nobody quite knows how they got there at this particular time, but they always seemed to be there at the time when this country needed them. I think the Senate is the kind of an institution now that the country needs to handle what's happened. I don't think it got here to handle it. I think that it's here because it was forced to be the kind of an institution it is because

other things happened within this country, and I mentioned some of those: the lobbying groups, and the communication and the television, and the airplanes and things like that. I think they forced this institution to be the kind of an institution it is today, compared to what it was thirty years ago.

Ritchie: Given what the institution has become, what would you recommend to a freshman senator who is just starting?

Hildenbrand: In terms of what?

Ritchie: Well, someone new coming in and sitting down to ask: what do you do to become an effective senator?

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Hildenbrand: The thing to do to become an effective senator, I think, is to focus on a single issue. Become an expert at something, whatever that is. You must have something that you feel strongly about, and I would just trade on that. In most instances, for your own career, from a reelection standpoint, you look at your state and decide what it is that is going to do the most for my state. So whatever that is, you focus on that. Then I think also you have to be very strong in constituent services. I think constituents expect you to be of service to them. It used to be, twenty or thirty or forty years ago, they'd elect you and they'd send you to Washington -- half of them didn't know where it was, they'd just send you someplace -- and leave you alone. These days they tell you: "Here's what I want you to do." It didn't use to be that way, but that's pretty much the way it is now. So you have to do those constituent services because they expect them.

There's something to be said for the proposals that people have made for limited time for a senator to serve. I'm not sure what the time is, but I can see the wisdom of a person not having to run for reelection, being able to come in here and make value judgments on issues outside of the political pressures that are brought to bear on members now. Whether that's two terms, or whether you increase the term and say you get eight years instead of six, and then you can only run once. You'd get your money's worth out of a member if he spent eight years here. He'd spend a couple of years learning what

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was going on, then he'd have six more in which he could really do something. But less than that really doesn't make any sense. Six years is not enough, I don't think, for a single term. To run twice doesn't make any sense because then for the first six years he's running for the second six years. That doesn't make any sense. But eight or ten years maybe would be something that you might think about, in that you only serve that period of time. That gives you enough time that you get

the experience that your need, and if you rotated them you'd always have the two-thirds of them that would have been here long enough to do whatever needs to be done.

The days of the Old Bulls being here from the time they were forty till they're eighty are long gone. You won't see another Strom Thurmond, or a John Stennis, who have served as long as they've served. Those records will never be broken because nobody's ever going to stay here that long. It's too trying physically and it sure as hell's too trying financially to stay here that long.

Ritchie: Also in terms of advice to a freshman senator, what's the best way for them to relate to other senators, particularly the older, established senators?

Hildenbrand: I think first and foremost you have to respect the institution. I think everybody should come in with a respect for the institution. Then you have to respect the people that make up that institution. People laugh and deride the members that get up and

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say, "My distinguished friend" from wherever it is, and they know that they hate his guts. Well, so what? There's an aura about that body that lends itself to that. If you don't have that you're going to have fist fights on the floor, and you don't need that. So allow that aura to continue to permeate that chamber, that respectful aura that they have. What they do outside, you know the old story about Strom Thurmond and [Ralph Yarborough](#) fighting in the hall of the Dirksen Building because Yarborough wanted Thurmond to go in and make a quorum and Thurmond didn't want to go in and make a quorum. You don't have too much of that any more. Members just don't have time to get that much involved in issues that they're going to go fight about them. But I think you have to respect the institution for exactly what it is and the role that it plays. Then I think you have to respect the individuals that are here, even though you don't agree with them.

Ritchie: Is it as important for a new senator to keep quiet in the beginning and be be deferential to the senior senators as it was say twenty years ago?

Hildenbrand: Probably not. I would like to see it that way. I would like to go back to the days when you didn't talk for the first year, except to answer your name when they called it. But I don't think that the electorate would put up with that. I think they expect you to hit the ground running and do something the first day

that you're there, remake the wheel or whatever it is. So I don't think it would work. I would like to see it. I think there's a learning experience that goes along with that that would make you a much better senator than they have today, if you spent that first year learning instead of shooting off your mouth, because you can't learn while you talk.

[Jim Allen](#) started that, as a matter of fact. He was the one that came in here and broke the business of not talking for the first year. You know, in the old days people used to come over to hear somebody's maiden speech. Now you have to get there as soon as they open the doors because some guy's going to make his maiden speech. In those days, people would send out letters to their colleagues to announce they were going to go make their maiden speech, they'd been here a year. [Cale Boggs](#) did that. But not anymore. I'd like to see it come back, but I don't think the electorate would stand for it.

Ritchie: Is it as important for a member to know the rules these days?

Hildenbrand: No, not unless he's going to be in the leadership. He's pretty well protected. Nobody's going to embarrass him. They're not going to let him make major mistakes. I think it's important that he know the fundamentals of the rules so that he knows how to offer an amendment, what can happen to him when he offers it, when he loses the floor. They caught [John East](#) in that kind of a

situation two or three years ago, late at night, 1:00 o'clock in the morning or something. He was going on an all-night session. He was not up to the rules and either he yielded for something or he did something and the minute he did, Stevens got recognized and adjourned the Senate. John East sat there with his mouth open and had no idea what had happened to him. What had happened to him is he just wasn't totally conversant with all of the rules. So if you're going to be involved on the floor, in that kind of debate and amendments and things, it's important that you know fundamentally those rules that apply to the handling of bills and the handling of amendments. But some of the rules about who has access to the chamber and stuff like that it doesn't make very much difference.

Ritchie: In recent years a lot of people have been elected to the Senate who had no previous political career. They were athletes or astronauts or businessmen, but some of them were never elected to office before. Has this changed the nature of the body and created a new type of Senate?

Hildenbrand: Well, I think it has something to do towards doing that, but that's reflective more on our political systems in the states than it is here. Because

they no longer are requiring that you come up through the ranks before you can get a nomination. If you've got the money to put in the filing fee, you can run. The power of the state parties is not as strong as it used to be, so

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anybody that wants to put a filing fee down, if they can get the support can get himself elected. But, yes, I think that has a tendency to change the makeup of the Senate. I think it reflects more on issues outside of the political considerations than it might if you were dealing strictly with political animals. The people today are looking more at issues nonpolitically first than they are politically. Years ago you looked at things politically: what was it going to do to my party, or what was it going to do my state, or what was it going to do me? Now they look at the issue more as to what the issue really is.

Ritchie: Are there any areas that we haven't touched on that you think would be important to cover?

Hildenbrand: Only my personal life, and we're not going to touch on that!

Ritchie: Well, Senator Baker called you the "Total Senate Man," so in a sense I guess the Senate has been your life.

Hildenbrand: Just about. It's certainly been a great part of my life, and it's been the most enjoyable part of my life, that's for sure.

Ritchie: Well, I thank you very much for participating in this oral history.

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Hildenbrand: Delighted to do it. And write to Mark Hatfield and tell him that I did what he told me I had to do, the last time I appeared before his committee.

End of Interview #7

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