
Interview with Leon G. Billings

The interview was conducted by David Welborn in Washington, D.C. on May 5, 1993

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DW: First of all Mr. Billings, thanks so much for letting us in this afternoon.

LB: You're very welcome.

DW: Let me ask you to provide a little bit of background that indicates what paths you followed that led you to the United States Senate.

LB: That could take up all the time we have. I came back to Washington in 1963, working for an outfit called American Public Power Association, which in the context of this interview was only important because one of its most important members was Tennessee Valley Public Power Association. I worked there for three years as a lobbyist and then I went to work for Senator Muskie in what was then called the Special Subcommittee on Air and Water Pollution. I spent fifteen years with Muskie, from 66 until he was retired by the electorate as Secretary of State in the Carter administration.

DW: You did go to the State Department with him when he left the Senate?

LB: Yes.

DW: What have you done since your time in the Department of State?

LB: Ran the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, ran my own consulting firm, served in the Maryland legislature for the past three years, and still run my consulting firm—plus I'm on the faculty of the University of Southern California and run their Washington politics program.

DW: You have a lot of your plate still. What do you remember about your first encounters with Howard Baker?

LB: He was short. I had known—not personally—but I had known his father and his mother, so the fact that Howard Baker was short was no surprise. The fact that he was so slim surprised me; Howard Baker, when I first met him, was very much a slim young fellow. The anecdote that I could tell you is that Ed Muskie in those days was about 6'5", 6'6"; when Howard Baker and Ed Muskie sat next to each other, because Muskie had these enormously long legs, they looked the same height. One day there was a hearing taking place and Baker was sitting on Muskie's right. At the end of the hearing, they stood up and a photographer took a
picture. Afterwards, after the picture came out in the paper, Baker came to Muskie in one of our markups and said, "Ed, don't ever stand up next to me again." The thing about Howard Baker that I remember the best was that he was an extremely warm person to staff. A lot of Senators were standoffish, some downright unfriendly, but Howard Baker treated us all from day one with a great deal of decency and respect. Not to say that Howard Henry, as we referred to him when he wasn't around, didn't insist that we remember the difference; that was important—he expected us to be appropriately deferential—but, on the other hand, he didn't treat us like we were some separate class of people. Because of an enormous and as I learned over the years justifiable confidence in his own intellectual skills, he loved to engage us in discussion. When I say "us," in those days "us" was a very small group of people, who were his colleagues in the Senate and there was myself and a fellow named Tom Jorling, who is now the New York Environmental Commissioner, who was then minority counsel to the Committee; Jim Jordan, who worked for Baker; Barry Meier, who was the chief counsel for the Committee; that was about it, there may have been a couple other people around—and it was very much a man's world in those days, too. We would sit in the back room in those wonderful days when Committee business was conducted in secret and we would sit around the table, the key staff and the Senators, and engage in intense and extensive discussion. Baker always invited our views and never missed an opportunity to teach us something. When was Baker elected to the Senate?

DW: 1966, so he took office in 67.

LB: We had a four-year effort between that major federal oil pollution liability law—it started in 1966 before he got there—and Baker introduced the idea of strict liability. We had previously not dealt with liability issues. I still remember his using terms like _ipso locutor_, terms that I, not being a lawyer, was unfamiliar with. He and Muskie would have these debates on tort law. Baker, being a relatively recent graduate of practicing law, and Muskie, having not practiced law for the better part of fifteen years, would engage in these extensive discussions over the nature of liability and the nature of the judicial process and how liability law applied to admiralty versus what they called _in rem_—the terms flash back as I sit here. He was always the teacher, and he decided he was going to teach me tort law. He taught me a little bit.

DW: What did Baker gain—I'm not suggesting that this was calculated—as a Senator, as a legislator, from the way he dealt with staff?
LB:  It helps to be respected in that institution, and it really helps to be liked and trusted. Ed Muskie always said that Senators in this institution who expect to get their way are very unhappy; Baker never really got his way, but he got a hell of a lot more. Our staff was different; anyone who recalls that era will tell you that, because we did not work as a majority and minority staff, we worked together. We had differing views and reflected the differing views of our members, but we worked as a cohesive unit for the purpose of developing legislation. The members who dealt with the staff with some respect and cordiality were themselves better taken care of, and their staff were more likely to be sitting at the table than the members who, to use a modern phrase, dissed us.

DW:  I've been led to believe that the culture of the Public Works Committee at that time was really quite distinctive in the Senate.

LB:  I can only comment on the culture of the Public Works Committee, which I've lobbied as a lobbyist, so I really have some familiarity with it beginning in 1963; it was a much more bipartisan committee. More importantly than that, Jennings Randolph did not like disputes; Jennings Randolph, while a West Virginia social liberal which in those days meant something different than social liberal means today—health care, labor type liberal—Randolph also had a lot of friends with economic interests. He realized that his friends were better off in consensus than confrontation. Secondly, Randolph didn't like confrontation, Randolph abhorred confrontation. He didn't like loud speaking, he didn't like harsh language; he liked a great deal of decorum and respect and cordiality among the members. He would work very hard to avoid going to a vote on anything. As a legislator myself, having seen how other chairmen work in other environments, some say, "All right, let's vote," and cut it and go, and some will sit there for hours and hours and hours to work to get a consensus. Randolph was a consensus chairman. As such, it meant that was one committee in the institutions of both House and Senate, and certainly in the Senate, where Republicans could have a significant influence on public policy as long as they wanted to move forward. Obstructionists didn't get anyplace on that committee, they just got frustrated. Also, traditional liberals who wanted to come in and vote on whatever their particular thing was and get out, who didn't want to have to spend the time to flesh it out, were very frustrated. But people like Baker and Muskie and Cooper… Tom Eagleton became a consensus politician out of that Committee, realized that here was a place where they could exchange points of view and influence each other, at least in part because they didn't have any alternative. If they wanted to make a difference, they had to sit around and talk it through. So it really was a different institution. If you ever read The Senate Nobody
Knows, the first half of that book is a pretty good characterization of that. Jim Buckley of New York, a self-styled conservative, came to the Senate and when he first came he said he wanted to be on an environment committee, so he ended up on the Interior Committee. He was there a very short period of time and found out that really wasn't the environment, so he moved over to Public Works. I think the first bill he was involved in may have been the 1972 Clean Water Act, it was one of those bills. He wrote what they called individual views in which he characterized how that committee worked and how different it was to work in a consensual environment in which every member's views were dealt with. His approach to Scoop Jackson who would come in and say, "I've got 16 proxies, do you want to push this to a vote?" So he rapped the gavel and _____.

DW: Was that in the report on the bill?

LB: Yes.

DW: I'll track that down. When Baker first came to the Public Works Committee, what were his basic views on environmental policy, or did he come with preformed views? What was the nature of his interest in environmental questions?

LB: It is not clear to me. Almost no one wanted to be on the Public Works Committee; Jim Buckley was one of the few. Most thought the Committee was sort of the place where you put people; Ed Muskie was put on Public Works because he fought Lyndon Johnson on Rule 22 when he was first elected to the Senate and converted it into a piece of history. So, I don't exactly know how Howard Baker got there, but once he was there, it was foreign to his personality not to participate. He had some very, very bright young staff people, Jim Jordan being one of them, people like Rick Herrod and Jim Range and others who came along later, who also liked to participate. Baker was one of these guys who attracted very, very talented, loyal people to him. There were so many places in the Senate where you couldn't participate. Remember that committee staffs were much smaller and they were much more in control; member staffs were much smaller, and member staff people were assigned to work on a committee by their boss—or two or three committees—so a person like Jim Jordan who might be dealing with two or three of Baker's committees found that on most of his committees he was irrelevant, so he would migrate to our process. So it's hard to totally disconnect what Baker's interest was and the degree to which his staff became _____ in some of these things. One thing we did learn early on was that Howard Baker is a technofreak, he was referred to as a technofreak. Howard Baker is one of these people who
appear to have an absolute faith that any problem could be solved with technology, that if you could define the problem, you could define a solution. These may be myths—number one, we're talking about 25 years. _____ Number two, the staff have myths; we never sit down and say to a member, "Hey, you're a technofreak, where did it come from?" You have to guess these things and piece them together on conversations over years with the staff, which we did a lot of on Friday afternoons. The myth was that Howard Baker was an intellectual protege of Alvin Weinberg of Oak Ridge. Alvin Weinberg was one of these brilliant, highly motivated scientists who believed that you could solve problems with technology, and you just had to have the wherewithal and the commitment to do it. What Baker brought to the Environment and Public Works Committee, in addition to his wonderful personality and this great analytical mind, was this belief—almost an ideology—that all problems could be solved by the technological cavalry coming over the hill.

DW: Did his views on technology directly translate into the water and air legislation of 1970?

LB: Yes. I've often said that the Clean Air Act of 1970, particularly the auto emissions standards which are the most famous or infamous part of that legislation, are a product of basically three people, maybe four: one was Tom Eagleton, who was a freshman Senator who had been on the Labor Committee which was writing the Coal Mine Health and Safety Act and who was an enormously frustrated throughout that process. They had made promises but no commitments; he would pound on the table, saying, "Our constituents are sick and tired of the government making promises and not keeping them. By God, if we're going to clean up the air, we're going to set some deadlines to do it." Muskie, who was far and away the more moderate in his thinking; Muskie, as you know, was a tremendous liberal, but his process were all extremely moderate. Muskie never operated out of low gear, probably low range. He said, "Wait a minute, guys. We're talking public health here. If we are going to set deadlines, we're going to set deadlines that will achieve air quality that will protect public health." So when they got into the auto emissions questions, they decided they had to reach clean air by a certain date. Baker said, "I'm perfectly willing to force that knowledge; we're going to set emissions standards. We going to tell these auto companies what kind of level of pollution control they have to get." Baker pushed the idea of pressing technology from the idea of deadlines and Muskie from the idea of public health standards, and they came together as the embodiment of the Clean Air Act in 1970. Then in 1972, it was more the same group of people with the addition of a couple of others trying to figure out what tools that we put together in the Clean Air Act could be used in the Clean Water Act. That's why
we went to technology-based standards there. To the extent there is something in federal environmental law called technology-based standards, that's how it came to be.

DW: Did Howard Baker have to learn a whole lot after he came to the Senate to be an effective legislator, or was he a natural?

LB: I don't know what an effective legislator is.

DW: I'm not sure I do either! Someone who participates, enables, and exercises influence.

LB: Howard Baker had, as I said in the outset to this interview, incredible people skills. If I had to pick something for a politician to survive either on the stump or in their legislative body, it's people skills that make the difference. He had that going for him; not everybody has a mother who was a member of Congress, a father who was a member of Congress, and a father-in-law who was a member of Congress, so he clearly had a fairly good dose of a lot of this stuff at the dinner table all of his life. So he had all of that. He had good oratorical skills; he wasn't too good at legislative management skill. If Howard Baker had a limitation, it was that he would bury himself in a particular project until it was done, then he would go on to the next one. In contrast with Muskie, whatever he buried himself in, he always kept it with him when he went on to the next. Howard would just discreetly leave something behind and go to the next ______. Sometimes, ten years later, you could be talking to Muskie about something and the details of the logic and the rationale of why he did something ten years before would be equally motivating ten years later; for Baker it was not necessarily so.

DW: I'm not sure I understand; you mean to say that he would--

LB: He would change his mind. Baker came to a lot of positions almost like there was divine intervention; he would see a problem and he would see a solution to the problem. He would articulate the solution to the problem, but as I learned later, it wasn't an ideological commitment to the solution so much as using his skills to find a solution. Not necessarily bound to that solution either; in terms of a continuum, he would stay bound to the solution through the legislative process, but if you went back to him ten years later and said, "My God, Senator, you wrote that provision at that time," he would say, "Yes, but that was that time and this is now." If you went back to Muskie ten years later, he would say, "Yes, by God, and it's in stone." That distinguished him.
DW: Are you making a distinction between the insight and intuition of the moment, which is a very pragmatic way to deal with a problem?

LB: You have to remember, Howard Baker was a Republican, and Muskie was a very strongly philosophically dedicated kind of guy. I won't bring up Muskie all the time, but [...] Muskie methodically, analytically, infuriatingly slowly, would go through until he reached a point of conviction that he could defend, and woe be unto anyone who tried to change his mind after this—especially somebody who helped to get him there in the first place. With Baker it was, "Here is a problem. The responsibility is to solve the problem and move the process along and go to the next problem." It became evident to me as we moved along that this guy was a problem-solver and a practical politician, he wasn't someone who was doing this because [...] which made it possible for him to deal with Jesse Helm and Howard Metzenbaum as majority leader—which made him a very good majority leader—but it also caused some people who take as writ something you've done in the past.

DW: Let me ask you to expand upon the Muskie-Baker relationship. Here we have a Republican and a Democrat, people who approach problems differently, there are differences in temperament, yet they appear to work well together over a considerable period of time.

LB: They like each other a lot; I never got a sense that either one of them had any gladhanding skills at all. They probably were both very good out in the state on the stump, but in terms of the Senate as an institution, they were fairly private people. Baker was a somewhat more of a public man than Senator Muskie was, but not a lot more, perhaps in part because of his personal situation, but perhaps in part because he didn't care for that any more than Ed Muskie did. You just didn't see these guys on the cocktail circuit or diplomatic circuit, stuff like that. They were both really dedicated, committed participants in the institution; they believed in the institution, believed in making it work. They loved the intellectual stimulation of one another. As an example, when we did this 20th anniversary of the Clean Water Act, Baker basically said, "I will do anything [...]" and this is twenty years later. There's a person regard between the two that hasn't been shaken; yet I would say to you they were never close personal friends, they didn't go dancing together with their spouses. They enjoyed being with each other; when Muskie became Secretary of State, the first person I went to build a bridge between the Secretary of State and the United States Senate was Howard Baker. I used to send a car for Baker, bring him down to the basement of the State Department; he'd get in an elevator, go up and have breakfast with Muskie, or whatever
time of day they met, and he'd get in the car and go back, and no one except me ever knew
he was there. Baker didn't tell anybody, Muskie didn't tell anybody. It used to drive the
institution nuts, because Muskie would be having a private meeting and nobody would
know who was in there. I got a little pressured myself because I set up the meetings, but I'd
never tell! As far as I knew they were just telling dirty jokes!

DW: As you were working your way through a complex piece of legislation, sometimes taking
years to do it, inevitably Baker and Muskie must have had different views on numerous
occasions, a different sense as to what ought to be done and how. As to the two of them on
the subcommittee, how were these differences worked out? What kind of process was
employed?

LB: These were really the most ___, because the Committee worked by consensus. They would
just talk it out; very often they would have private meetings in Muskie's office or in Baker's
office where they would be off the floor, they would just talk it through, the latest
Billings/Jorling memo, whatever. Sometimes Jim Jordan and I would see Muskie and Baker
or one of the staff people, Rick Herrod or Jim Range and I would see that they were coming
to a point where they would not reach an agreement, and then we would scramble to avoid
that confrontation.

DW: How would you do that?

LB: Just try to figure out a way around it. Neither one of them gave a whole lot of ground. It
was very, very often that I would have to sell Muskie on something that Baker wanted to do
or Jim had to sell Baker on something Muskie would want to do. We would have to find
out what terms we could put it in that met their either political or philosophical needs. The
only time it ever really approached confrontation was in the context of the 1977 Clean Air
Act amendments. In 1976, the Clean Air Act had died in the Congress because the
conservatives forced the Conference Committee the report to be read on adjournment night,
so we never got it through. In 1977, we had some problems—the auto industry was in
trouble—and Baker had made up his mind intellectually that he didn't like the knock
standard that was in the law. He came in early on in the process and he said, "Leon, I want
to change the knock standard." You have to understand that these guys frequently talk
through staff when they didn't really want to say something unpleasant or difficult. I
remember this vividly in the Committee hearing room; Baker came in the room after one of
the sessions and said, "Leon, I want to change the knock standard." I said, "Senator, we
should change the knock standard, but we shouldn't change it now. If we do what you want
to do now, we going to end up with something less." He said, "I'm willing to stick with you,
Leon, but we have to change the knock standard." I said, "I understand, Senator." So then a
few weeks later the process was moving along; Baker came to me and said, "Leon, you
haven't forgotten?" I said, "Senator, I haven't forgotten that you want to change the knock
standard." So we got on the floor and we still had the Committee bill and we knew we
would lose the Committee provision, the politics of the Senate had shifted—Don Reigle
was there, Phil Hart had died and Reigle had become Senator. All of a sudden the auto
companies had a toady on the floor. We knew that Reigle was going to offer an amendment
to the Committee bill. I went to Senator Baker and said, "Can I see you off the floor?" He
said, "Yes." I said, "Now it's time to change the knock standard." We went into a meeting
with Senator Byrd and Senator Baker said, "I want to change the knock standard." Muskie
said, "I don't want to change the knock standard." I said, "I know, but if we don't change the
knock standard we will lose." He said, "I don't want to offer the amendment." I said, "You
don't have to. I'm sure that Senator Baker will." Senator Byrd said, "I will," so it became
the Byrd-Baker amendment. [...] Reigle got up and offered his amendment and I said,
"OK, now you can offer your amendment," so they offered a substitute. We blew away
Riegle, Baker got what he wanted by being patient and trusting me. He got real nervous
because I took it all the way out to the end, but he never really had to confront Muskie.
That's a fairly good story of how it works. On the other hand, [we had a problem with
TVA], which I took personal care of.

DW: Which problem was that?

LB: A question of putting scrubbers on all the power plants. There was a little old grandfather
clause that we put in the bill. Rick came to me and said, "We have this problem on TVA.
The Senator is very nervous." I said, "Why don't we figure out how nervous the Senator has
to be." So we had some extensive discussions; finally we decided the Senator wouldn't be
very nervous if we took care of this one power plant. So I said, "Rather than put the Senator
in the situation of having to offer an amendment that would affect TVA, because I don't
want to get in the business of having every Senator come in here and try to take care of their
own situation, let me take care of it." Rick said that would be right nice, so in the next
Committee print there came a little provision which basically said something like "any
power plant that was whatever longitude, latitude, construction date"—whatever it took to
isolate this provision to one plant—"won't have to comply with this particular provision." And that thing just floated right on through, and nobody ever asked until Howard Baker was
running for president. Some reporter came in and thought they had an example of this fix on Howard Baker. They came in asking how Howard Baker had fixed that; I said, "Howard Baker didn't have a damn thing to do with that. I did it all by myself." That's absolutely true.

DW: We've got the bipartisan Public Works Committee and in the late 1960s and early 1970s a fairly partisan presidency. How did Baker find his way between these two entities on environmental policy questions?

LB: I don't really have a sense of that, if you're talking about Nixon and the vetoes and stuff like that. Because virtually every environmental bill started out in the Public Works Committee—the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, everything beneath them—and because virtually everyone of them was brought into consensus—if you back, all the basic one were passed unanimously—and because conference committees of the House and Senate always operated as a single unit, we never had any division or whatever. The Republicans on the Committee had a major investment in the product; Muskie never sold them out in conference, never ever gave ground. If we made a deal in the Senate to get them on _____, we didn't let them down in the conference when Henry Waxman or Paul Rogers wanted to do more than they were prepared to do. And they knew that, they knew they had that kind of relationship. So it was a hell of a lot easier for them to say to a Republican president, "Sorry. We've already made our ___. These guys have dealt straight with us, we're going to deal straight with them." That's why the Clean Water Act veto was overridden so handsomely in 1972. ___. If you interviewed Bill Ruckleshaus, you would find that he found Howard Baker no easier to deal than Ed Muskie, simply because they didn't feel they had to. One of the nice things about an institution like that is when you make your peace within the institution, then to everybody else you can just say, "Hey, guys, [get on with it]."

DW: When a bill came out of the environmental subcommittee and came onto the floor, would Muskie manage it on the floor?

LB: Yes.

DW: And would Baker play an active role in its management?
LB:  Baker was only ranking member for a short period of time because he went off to the Commerce Committee; Buckley was ranking member for awhile, Boggs was ranking member of the subcommittee.

DW:  I think he was ranking member until he became minority leader—for what period of time, I don't recall.

LB:  Hale Boggs was ranking member for so many years, and Boggs was always supportive if we sent anything. It was generally Baker; John Sherman Cooper always played a very major role. If you go back and read the record, you will find there are certain things that Baker took on, like citizen suits and stuff like that. He tended to take on more of the lawyer questions. The other thing is that Muskie was such a learned legislator, Muskie would master a bill backwards and forwards. Muskie would know the answer to every question that could possibly be asked, plus those that would never be asked, before he ever went to the floor. You didn't have the parceling out kind of thing. [When the sledding got tougher—1975, 1976, 1977—then he was very important] because we were having to negotiate with people like Hatch and Riegel and so on; Baker was much more comfortable pulling people together in the back room, something Muskie was not good at.

DW:  How did Baker go about trying to influence other Senators to come into agreement with him or to provide support for him on a matter? What was his approach?

LB:  In that Committee that didn't really happen much. Baker was respected for his intellect and his analytical abilities. People like Cooper or Muskie or others would listen to him. He didn't waste his intellect, he didn't talk too much. Again, because it was such a consensus process, ______. I've learned _____ you can [indicate] the outcome by the quality of the question you ask, not necessarily the quality of the answer you get or the answer that you give. Baker was that kind of guy; Baker could take issues and basically either dress them up and send them out or completely eviscerate them by just asking questions—pointed, piercing questions—to Tom or myself or Barry. Very often, the members used us as foils. There was less interplay amongst themselves than there was using us as backboards to bounce off their questions. Baker would ask a particularly antagonistic question of me and put me on the spot; depending on my quality of answer, I might ______. [it was more that quality of process]. Also, _____ public floor to make statements, in their negotiating posture and their developmental debate, they would tend to do it all by asking questions of each other. There was in the Senate for one term a fellow named Bill Scott, who will recall
was listed by some news magazine as "the dumbest member of the United States Senate." He then promptly called a press conference to deny it. Scott did not like, not one iota, the bipartisan nature of the Committee. Baker almost always gave his proxy to Muskie; the reason he did was, number one, he knew he wouldn't cast it unless he knew exactly where Baker was, because he badly needed him, and two, because he trusted his judgment to use it. On one occasion, we had a vote on something Scott was interested in; we voted and Muskie cast Baker's proxy. Scott went berserk; he literally went nuts in the room, screaming, "I can't believe that a Democrat has a Republican proxy!" Bla-bla-bla. Baker, on hearing this, was a little nonplussed; he didn't know what to do. Finally he said, "Leon, Ed's got my proxy, but if that Scott amendment comes up, and it only has one vote, you make sure Muskie _____." So it did, it only had one vote and Muskie voted Baker the other way. I said, "Senator, no!" He said, "Excuse me, Senator Baker votes _____." Scott went nuts again, virtually never came back!

**DW:** Did Baker's interest or involvement in the work of the Committee, particularly the environmental subcommittee, diminish considerably after he became minority leader?

**LB:** Yes. He tended to dabble more than _____ after that. [He had staff people deeply involved up until I left]. Not only did his active participation diminish, but his staff didn't represent him as well. That was primarily because Baker's not the kind of person staff represents well. If he's there, then they follow his lead; if he's not there, he's a very, very hard guy to predict. To anticipate where he would come out on any given debate on any issue, especially this kind of stuff, would be extremely difficult. _____.

**DW:** This is no doubt an unfair question, but on the Democratic side of the aisle, what was the view of Baker as the minority leader?

**LB:** I don't really know. Because I had my own personal relationship with Baker, both as minority and majority leader, it never occurred to me that other people's relationship would be significantly different.

**DW:** Are you in a position to compare his performance as minority leader with those of Dirksen and Scott—questions of effectiveness, perceptions in regard to relative strength.

**LB:** I have a better perception of him as majority leader, looking at him from the outside as a guy who because of his incredible political skills hauled Ronald Reagan's ashes time and
time again; who one time said to me when I was talking about how he was getting along
with the likes of Howard Metzenbaum and others, he said, "Howard's easy, it's Jesse Helms
and those guys that are driving me nuts!" As a politician, he believed that government had
an affirmative responsibility to get something done. _____. Because he believed in
developing a consensus around progress, however modest that progress might be—or if
progress is only defined as getting affirmative action on a piece of legislation—he probably
made Reagan's first term, and he's very underrated for that role.

DW: Let me follow up on that. How did Baker make Reagan? What difference did it make that
it was Howard Baker who was the majority leader and not somebody else?

LB: Probably as little or as much as a matter of style, Baker having a capacity to be self-
effacing; Baker, who had undoubtedly one of the best senses of humor of anybody I've ever
met; Baker, who could deal with idiots and geniuses almost equally well, which made it
possible to work with Ronald Reagan and with Ed Muskie. I don't think that Baker's
personality got in the way of getting things done. That does not mean that he wasn't petulant
or capable of being petulant, that he didn't want to get his own way—but in terms of the
bigger ends, when Muskie asked for Baker's help as secretary of state and Baker as minority
leader then, Baker delivered the Senate. Nobody even knew we were there, and he never
got any credit for it. His name never appeared on the check, but he picked up the bill. Baker
was one of these guys who could go home at night knowing that he had been successful and
didn't really give a shit if anybody else knew that he was successful. There are not a lot of
people like that, but that's a very, very important quality.

DW: Do you remember any particular matters on which Muskie sought Baker's help when
Muskie was secretary of state?

LB: Yes, the Afghanistan Revolution. Just before we went off to some foreign minister's
meeting, all of a sudden on its own initiative, out of the blue, the United States Senate
passed unanimously a resolution endorsing our policy in Afghanistan; Muskie was able to
walk into a NATO meeting and be able to report that while he was in the air flying over, the
Senate had passed this resolution, that the United States boycott was supported by the
Senate of the United States. Golly gee, wasn't that wonderful? and we didn't have anything
to do with it.
DW: I have trouble in isolating Baker's influence as majority leader in the Senate from others in the Republican leadership, because that which is centralized on the Democratic side is split up on the Republican side—and finding a way to capture, for want of a better term, his power position among Republicans in the Senate.

LB: I suppose the only person who could really tell you that would be Jim Cannon. Cannon, who probably was Howard Baker's Howard Baker, who was his _____ intellect, could probably characterize that for you. I don't know that Jim Range could; those were the two people; Tommy Griscom—I don't know who else might.

DW: One person characterized it this way: the others were lieutenants, but Baker was clearly the captain. I may never find a persuasive answer to the question.

LB: Remember that in the Senate, [the term leader is a misnomer]. Bob Byrd turned being majority leader into being [Uriah Heep], the most unctuous man in America, because he took care of everything. So, to a degree, you elect somebody as majority leader who won't compete with you, won't threaten you, and will take care of you. People like Fritz Hollings and Ed Muskie never became majority leader because they were threats to their colleagues, that they would use that position to advance themselves beyond the Senate—or they would use that position at the expense of their colleague. If you try to characterize a person who is leader in any way that raises any of those specters, then you probably don't have a person who is leader. The fact is that Bob Dole is asserting a role as minority leader which is stronger than any role I've seen a minority leader to play since Everette Dirksen. As titular head of the party and as minority leader, Baker never had to do that because he had a Republican president. Mitchell might have wanted to, but the Senate Democrats would never let him. Mike Mansfield in 1964 declared all Senators equal, and it's never been the same since. Lyndon Johnson as a majority leader used the Senate, ran the Senate, abused the Senate, and controlled the Senate, but then he had ten or eleven committee chairmen, all of whom supported him, most of them were from the South. When Howard Baker took over, when George Mitchell took over, chairmen didn't owe their position to anybody but themselves; they had no loyalty to anybody but themselves. You basically become Mr. Coalition Builder. In terms of what I've said about Howard Baker, if he was a successful majority leader and I think he was, it was because those were the skills that he brought. A coalition builder, a consensus builder, a compromiser, cajoler; I would argue that those are the skills that he learned on the Environment and Public Works Committee.
DW: I think that's an appropriate note on which to close.