
Interview with James Free

The interview was conducted by David Welborn in Washington DC on May 3, 1994

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DW: Well, it's nice to talk to a Tennessean every now and then, when we come to Washington. So we appreciate your willingness to sit down with us this afternoon and talk a little bit about Howard Baker. Let me ask you to first sketch out for us how you came to find yourself in the White House with President Jimmy Carter, in 1977.

JF: Basically through a friendship developed with Governor Carter because of my association with my friend [and] employer, the Speaker of the Tennessee House of Representatives, Ned McWherter, who has, as you know, since become governor. I was in an intern program at Middle Tennessee State University in 1968, which was with the State Legislature, and I went to Nashville on this intern program and met this new, young state legislator from Dresden named Ned McWherter. And Ned and I became a team, if you will. And during that period of time, about 1971-72 met Governor Carter, and I think the story there is that Governor asked Ned any time he was ever in Atlanta, to come see him. We were down there at some NCSL meeting, and Ned told me to pick up the phone and call the governor's office and tell him we were here and "hello," and Governor Carter's assistant who I talked to, a guy named Frank Moore, who went on to become very much a part of Howard Baker's life in the White House years of Carter's there, said, "We'll send a Highway Patrol car to get you, to come on down and have a cup of coffee with the governor." And we went down there—this is 1973, by then—spring, summer of 1973. And we go down there and spend about an hour-and-a-half with Governor Carter, and he was trying to talk Ned into running for governor in 1974 in Tennessee. And after this long visit with the governor of Georgia, we get back in the car and go back up I-75 to our hotel, and I said, "I wonder why he spent so much time with us." And Ned, who will occasionally smoke a cigar, pulled his cigar out and said, "He's running for president." And three years later, he did. But it was through that association I got involved in the Carter campaign and—a piece of Tennessee history there—Hamilton Jerden and those people running Carter's campaign, came to Ned and said, "We want you to run the campaign," and he said, "I'll help run the campaign, but I don't need to be the front guy. My majority leader is Stanley Rogers, who is the state representative, will be the campaign manager. And I'll get it all done and free to help." And then Stanley Rogers took off doing this job, and then Joe L. Evans retired, and asked his retirement. And Stanley Rogers, the House Majority Leader, jumped up to run for that congressional seat, and then a young guy named Albert Gore, Jr. decided he would run for it too. And you know how that came out. And in the processes of that, at 28 I guess I was, I became the State Campaign Manager for Governor Jimmy Carter's race for the presidency in 1976.

JF: There were a few of us.

DW: Do you remember Mac Simpson?

JF: I do.

DW: Jimmy Carter has no more fervent admirer than and now than Mac Simpson.

JF: What happened in that race, then, was that we were the second largest percentile win for Carter in the primaries, with obviously Georgia being 80-something, but Tennessee, in that primary, voted for Jimmy Carter 78%. What had happened there was, George Wallace had been kind of put out of the thing by losing Florida. And Scoop Jackson could have been a little bit of a threat, but when Carter beat him three weeks before our primary in Pennsylvania, then his kind of win was out of his campaign. And I had already made a deal with Scoop Jackson's campaign manager, a guy named Tommy Weisman, that if Jackson lost Pennsylvania, wouldn't Tommy just come on and be part of the Carter thing and _____, and he said, "You know, if we can't win Pennsylvania, we can't win the nomination anyway, so you bet." So the cards kind of all fell in a row. And then after the Convention, I went on to be the coordinator for Tennessee/Alabama/and Mississippi—all three, in the fall, which was an exciting, tough job for a 28-year-old kid, because what you were doing—putting together the original Carter people, all of whom were a bit more to the left than the average George Wallace Democrat in the state, trying to meld them together to try to win the general, was a challenge.

DW: When did you first become aware of a Republican politician named Howard Baker? What do your memories go back to?

JF: My first kind of memory of Howard Baker goes back to his first race, when he beat Frank Clement. Being at MTSU—I mean, I know you folks from Knoxville think that all politics emanates off that campus, but let me assure you, when it comes to Tennessee politics, you need to come to MTSU, because that's where the hotbed of it all is. All these college kids down there are all involved in all this stuff, and you can go check in any campaign, statewide, and that's where you'll find us. But Frank Clement appointed Ross Bass to take
the last two years of Estes Kefauver's seat—right?

DW: Well, actually, there was a special election in 1964, and Ross Bass won the Democratic nomination, and in the general election he beat Baker.

JF: In 1964?

DW: In 1964. And then there was a primary on the Democratic side in 1966, and Clement beat Bass. And Baker then beat Clement.

JF: And that's where I first remembered Howard Baker. You know, this Republican who had just won this statewide race, which I guess is the first time a Republican had won a statewide race since I had become politically kind of conscious.

DW: Since Reconstruction, I think.

JF: So you know, it was pretty phenomenal.

DW: Were you actively involved in that campaign?

JF: Not—no. I mean, I had just gotten to MTSU as a freshman. You know, I don't have any great remembrance of being involved in that campaign. If I can reflect back on it, it was part of a problem with the Clement campaign. It was kind of old and stodgety, and old courthouse crowd, and Baker got a lot of people my age kind of involved in politics because he was kind of the new, different approach to politics. And the same with the Clement/Ellington/Kefauver/Gore crowd.

DW: Do you remember how you personally reacted to him during that campaign? What kind of impression he made on you?

JF: I was probably too much involved in the Kappa Sigma parties. No, I can't remember right off. I mean, every impression throughout my life of Howard Baker has always been of quite a gentle gentleman. I mean by that, a guy who didn't have a lot of rough edge to him—who was sophisticated in his mannerisms, and homespun enough not to come off as being arrogant, and all kind of nice.
DW: During that period from 1969 to 1976 when you were associated with McWherter, did you develop any kind of impression as to the kind of relationship there was, if any, between McWherter and Baker, as McWherter came on the scene as a poli—

JF: OK, that's when I'd get up close to Howard Baker. Because he and Ned hit it off from the beginning. I mean they both were kind of gentle, soft, talking image-wise, now, kind of gentlemen in politics that I think made them become friends. I mean, there was no secret to the fact that Governor McWherter was not a particular fan of Senator Brock's—never had been. I don't know, never have found out what the history is there. Ned used to talk about fabled poker game that they were in, that I don't know the details of, but the truth of the matter is that Senator Baker and Ned had a common goal, as I think we will talk about later, about Senator Baker. That particular common goal was what was good for Tennessee—even though one was a Democrat and one was a Republican. The fact that there styles were similar and they both kind of liked each other made them good and close working relationships and an association that benefited Tennessee. It was during that period of time that I got to be around him, too. He was always quite nice to this kid that was always around behind Ned McWherter.

DW: What were the circumstances in which McWherter and Baker would find themselves at the same place, together as it were?

JF: Oh, all of those events. The Gridiron Show, the State Heart Ball, the Tennessee Press Association, you-name-it—the Catfish Fry, the Ramp Festival, you know all those things. Only place that has more is Louisiana. But at those kind of events. Mule Day. And then in the halls of power—you know—in the state capitol, on an issue that affected whatever—the U.S. Senator, and the speaker of the House, and whoever might be governor, be it Winfield or Dunn or whoever.

DW: Beyond McWherter, during that period of time, before Baker became Republican Leader again, is it possible to generalize how the leading Democratic politicians in general viewed Baker—as a man, and in political terms?

JF: Howard Baker was a partisan—no question about that. And the Democrats who were more partisan than say, perhaps, the Democrat that I kind of chose as my role model, Ned
McWherter, you know, always did the regular rap on a captive of big business, no interest in the small guy, and all he cares about are the folks out at the country club, and those kind of things. But Baker, much to his credit, had a wonderful kind of——Howard Baker was a conservative Republican, but he was able to be moderate at times, and strategically give votes that never made him the antithesis of what the labor movement wanted. Bill Brock helped, I might add. Later, when they were both in the halls of Congress together. Because Brock would always be to the right of Baker, making Baker come off more moderate, when Baker was certainly not anything other than a conservative Republican. But you know how politics tends to start putting you in these little files. I think that most Democratic leaders looked at Baker as the reasonable guy who you could do business with, when it came to cutting a deal to get a piece of legislation, or cutting a deal to get a project—you know they would go together to come up to whoever was president, or to get the Appropriations Committee to do whatever. Baker was a very good constituent politician. So if he felt you were right, and I think this reoccurs when we talk about when I was in the White House, he would help you despite your party affiliation. And that bode well for him over the years, because he kind of became almost a bipartisan nominee. I mean, there were a lot of Democrats in Tennessee quite obviously, particularly back in the beginning, who still claimed to be Democrats, and voted for Howard Baker without any reservation.

DW: I've heard it said by Baker people that one of the characteristics of Senator Baker as a politician is his willingness to sort of go out of his way to win over his "natural enemies." On the other side of the aisle, as it were. John Siegenthaler, for one, when at The Tennessean, even Frank Clement, after that 1966 race, apparently Baker went out of his way to be friendly and helpful to Clement when Clement was having some pretty rough times. Does that strike you as a fairly reasonable kind of characterization?

JF: It does indeed. And what it also reminds you of is his father-in-law, who I think had a great influence on him. His mother and father had a great influence on him; both of those people were in public service, but you know, Everett Dirksen and his relationship with Lyndon Johnson was certainly that way. And I think that kind of reflected all throughout Howard Baker's public career, too, as a reflection of Everett Dirksen.

DW: Let's go back to that 1966 campaign, just for a moment. You made a reference to the seeming fact that the Democratic organization in Tennessee at that time was tired, which obviously is a part of the explanation for Baker's success in that election. But what was it about, in your estimation, what was it about Baker as a politician that made him attractive to
the people of Tennessee, including people in West and Central Tennessee, that led to his rather substantial victory?

JF: Well, you see, unfortunately I'm cynical enough now to think that most people in politics get elected because the other guy loses. And this is not as pro-Baker as I am generally a pro-Howard Baker guy. Howard Baker certainly was not threatening, and came off as a reasonable fellow who every common man could entrust with public service. But I think there was also just a backlash against this Clement/Ellington dynasty of, by that time, 20 years in the state, and "enough already!" So I think that a lot of people went to the polls—you know, there was all this—Frank Clement was going to appoint himself, and that whole controversy back in that period—and then Ross Bass I don't think was perhaps as well thought of as a senator and public servant as perhaps people thought he should be. And there was just a lot of reaction against kind of that whole crowd at that time. It's not to demean that Senator Baker was not a great politician in that race to win, and pull together the factions and keep a lot of Democratic courthouse people home on the bench, if you will, but quite honestly, I think, a large part of that first victory was due to the fact of who he ran against.

DW: How did he keep a lot of the courthouse politicians—Democratic courthouse politicians—on the bench?

JF: Well I think you go see those people and let them know if you win you are going to work with them.

DW: And that, apparently, is one of the things that went on during that time. Were you involved as an active participant, a front-line participant in his 1972 and 1978 campaigns for re-election. Of course, in 1978 you were in the White House. Do you have any impressions of those particular contests?

JF: The 1972 I don't, again because I'm in this kind of fluctuation situation, where I am at The University of Tennessee for a few months, not doing very well in Law School, and Ned McWherter is running for the Speak of the House against an incumbent, and I'm standing in the Student Union Building every Saturday morning giving out football tickets to state legislators, asking them who they are voting for for Speaker. And then that night I would call Ned in Dresden and say, "How is Joe voting," and he'd say, "Joe's telling me he's voting
for me," and I'd say, "Well, he stood up here this morning and told the crowd he's for McKinney." And Ned and I had this great deal going when we were cross-checking. And how they were working became very important, because you might recall, in Ned's Speaker's race, in the caucus, he only prevailed by one vote. [He began his career to make it to the governor's mansion]. So the 1972 campaign—I'm not there. I don't know. Who did he run against?

DW: I was trying to think. I'm embarrassed to say that I've forgotten.

HS: I was voting absentee. _____.

DW: I'm sorry, I have drawn an absolute blank.

JF: Well you ought to be fired! You know?

DW: I know. Don't tell anybody, will you?

JF: In 1978, obviously, you know that was a very ticklish situation. Jane Eskind is a friend of mine, and still is a friend of mine, and her children are friends of mine, and Dick, her husband, is a friend of mine. And all that. But, as I'm sure we'll get to later in this interview, Howard Baker had been a tough partisan Republican leader of the Senate that worked very well with the Carter White House when he felt the Carter White House was correct, and I might add in foreign policy, he almost always thought we were correct. So the 1978 campaign was tough. For we Tennessee Democrats who were Carter Democrats, and all that. I'm speaking for myself. I remember, in my mind's eye, and Jane, if you ever hear this, forgive me, but you were there and know it's true, that there's this big rally in front of the War Memorial Building in Nashville for the Democratic ticket in 1978. And Carter's there, and it's one of those things where everybody's giving their speech, and now all the candidates are standing up at the podium, and Carter's standing there. And Jane reaches down and grabs his hand and twists it up like that. He did not grab her hand. And Jimmy Carter liked Jane Eskind just fine, but he had to be very uncomfortable, because of what he knew he was facing with Panama Canal—a lot of things, where Howard Baker was going to be so essential—and God knows who would have been the Republican leader if Howard Baker had not been. But it would not have been as fortuitous to the Carter White House, if it had been someone else.
DW: My understanding is that when you were in the White House, your principal responsibilities were on the House side.

JF: They were, and that brings up a wonderful story about Howard Baker, when I first get to Washington. Because I am now—when I first went to work over there I was 29 years old and I had worked for the Tennessee House of Representatives, and been Chief Clerk and the Administrative Assistant to the Speaker, and I was a big fish in a little pond, in Nashville, Tennessee. And then I come here, and at 29 I am working in the White House, and I think this is all quite nice. And I am assigned, as you were getting ready to say, to be the Congressional Liaison primarily doing the House of Representatives—which will put you in contact with the Senate in some respect, and in conference committee work, etc., etc., but my day-to-day job was going to be to prowl the halls of the Rayburn Building and the Cannon Building and the Long-worth Building and dealing with the 435 members of the House. So I hadn't been here but about 10 days and the phone rings, and this is without equal my favorite Howard Baker story. And it is the Republican leader of the United States Senate calling me. Well, you know, everybody else in the Congressional Liaison office was like running into the walls and, you know—Howard Baker was calling. Well, to me this was Ned's friend who I kind of knew—my friend, Howard Baker. So it was no big deal to me. So I take the call, and, "Hello, Senator, how are you? And, "How are you, Jim? Have you gotten settled in?" and "Yes," and "Have you talked to Ned lately? How's he doing?" "Fine," and you know, "How's Mrs. Baker?" "Fine." And then he says, "Jim, you're Ned's friend. You've been my friend. I want to help you any way I can. Let me know any way I can help." And I was so green, I said, "Well, you can't help me, because you know, I'm just doing the House side." And at that, the Senator was kind enough to not make fun of me, and instead he just chuckled and said, "Well Jim, I know that's so, but maybe I can help you. Why don't you come on up to my office in the Capitol Building in the morning, and we'll have a visit and drink a cup of coffee, and I'll see if I can think of anything I can maybe do to help you." And I thought this was probably going to be a fun morning, but a waste of my time. So the next morning I went off to the Republican Leader's office there, right off the Senate chambers, and went in and we had a cup of coffee and went through, "How's everybody doing?" and all that kind of—

DW: Was it just the two of you?
JF: At that meeting, yes. And he said, "Well Jim, I think I've thought of something I can do to help you. He said, "I've got the car downstairs. Let's go over to the House side and see if I can be of any help." I said, "Well, fine." So we get in his limousine and we go over to the Rayburn Building, and I'll never forget this, because his car pulls up into the horseshoe of the Rayburn Building, and every neck is craning about—you know, those senators don't go over to the House of the People often; the House members come over to see the House of Lords. So all of a sudden, here's the distinguished Senator from Tennessee with this kid in tow, going into the Rayburn Building. And he went in, and we went to see every one of the Republican leaders in the House. John Rhodes was Minority Leader of the House at that time, and John Anderson was, I think, the Whip, and Bob Michael was probably Caucus Chairman at that time. And we went to see these leaders, and Baker gave them the same rap at every office. He said, "Now this guy is working down in Carter's White House, and I know him, and he's from Tennessee, and he's my friend. And if it's not partisan, work with him. And I mean, I still benefit from that with a relationship with the current Leader of the House, Bob Michael. To this day.

DW: What were your feelings as these visits took place?

JF: Well, I mean, I just started swelling up. I mean, he just—oh that was an incredibly wonderful, kind thing for a man of such a busy schedule to take time out to do for Ned McWherter's friend, Jim Free. And you know, I cannot begin to describe over the last 20 years what that hour in the Rayburn Building, going around seeing these guys has meant to me personally, and professionally.

DW: So, it did, in fact, help you in doing your job on the House side.

JF: Well, of course it did.

DW: After that meeting, what kind of contacts or relationships did you have with Senator Baker's office?

JF: I would basically, as I did tell him in that first phone call, I mean, I was basically a creature of the House, doing House side stuff. But you know, I would see the Senator enjoy at social functions at the White House and around town. The President would have a leadership breakfast on Tuesday mornings, which sometimes included the bipartisan leadership, and I
was fortunate enough to go to those breakfast meetings in the White House with the Congressional leadership, and would always see Senator Baker at those that were bipartisan. And I'd see him on the Hill.

DW: There were several Tennessee issues that were kind of hot during that period. You had the Tellico Dam, the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway, the breeder reactor. All of which Senator Baker had some distinctive interest in. When matters would arise in connection with these, would the fact that you were from Tennessee and he was from Tennessee, and you knew the issues and the hometown perspective, as it were, bring you into a special kind of relationship in connection with him?

JF: Not really. Poor old Dan Tate had—the job I had on the House side, he had on the Senate side, and I think you've interviewed Dan already.

DW: I have, yes.

JF: And most of the interface on those projects were through Dan. If my memory serves me correct, Senator Baker, I think, thought that particularly the water project fight was very ill-conceived on Carter's part. But, Baker was never ruthless in his dealings, but he ended up prevailing, with a lot of help from people from the House side, like Tom Beville and others.

But let the record show that by the time Howard Baker gets to the White House with David Stockman and Ronald Reagan, they undid all those water projects. And at the end of the Carter 4-years, you know, we let Tennessee Tombigbee and—what's the other one in Tennessee?

DW: The Tellico Project?

JF: Yes. We know, we let that go to completion. And were happy to make the phone call to Senator Baker and Senator Sasser, by that time, to let them know that it had happened. But as onerous as it was at the time, Jimmy Carter was 100,000% right on those. There were no reasons in public policy to have that much public money spent on a lot of which were pure recreational water projects—particularly in a place like Tennessee, where you can water ski from Bristol to Memphis. And there were a lot of, I remember there was one catfish farm development in Oklahoma that was about a $3 million project that benefited one family. And again, I remind history that out of those 18 water projects, they finally all were done
away with, but by David Stockman being the head of OMB under President Ronald Reagan, in a White House that Howard Baker served in.

DW: Vindication.

JF: Well somewhat. We went at it environmentally hand budget. By the time they got there, the budget had become so overwhelming as a problem, they went at them purely as budget, and won.

DW: How would you—within the White House Congressional Liaison staff, House and Senate—

JF: Same thing is true about the breeder reactor, by the way.

DW: Right. Yes. Within the White House Congressional Liaison staff, people working on both the House and Senate side, what was sort of the general view of Howard Baker as the Majority Leader? When people talked about him, in what terms would they discuss him?

JF: As I said, I think he was looked upon as a partisan who was reasonable and wanted to do what he felt was best for his country. And if that intersected with what Jimmy Carter thought, he was there as a colleague and a person who wanted to assist in the passage of that legislation. It's particularly true again in foreign policy.

DW: Of course, Senator Baker was especially helpful to President Carter on the Panama Canal treaties. It's been written a lot about, and we've talked to several people about that. Were you—

JF: We were all involved in that, and the thing that history needs to note is that it's my opinion that Howard Baker thought that passage of the Panama Canal Treaty was right—and he thought that so much so—and he thought that was so important, that he had to know that he would perhaps be jeopardizing the thing he wanted the most. And I think history probably should reflect accurately that the support of the passage of the Panama Canal Treaty denied Howard Baker ever being the nominee of his Party for the presidency—that one single courageous act.

DW: Well, certainly it did not do him any good. Are there any other specific situations you can
recall when Senator Baker was of special help?

JF: He was unquestionably the difference of the passage of the lifting of the Turkish Arms Embargo legislation, which brought balance to that part of the world. And it was done over the enormous strong objections and political clout of the American Greek community, which is, as we found out in 1988 with Governor Dukakis, a very formidable, vocal part of the American political scene. He also, I remember, was quite bullish and stood up against a lot of wind in the sale of F5s to Egypt and the F15s to Saudi Arabia. Which again brought some balance to the Middle East that helped, I think, in what finally ended up being the Camp David Accords, bringing that reality of balance. And you can imagine the opposition to those sales from the American Jewish community.

DW: How did he help in those two situations? What exactly did he do?

JF: He talked reason, and he talked to his fellow Republicans and got a few of them to come along. Or helped them in making up their minds—that he could be for this Carter policy—and if they were for it, they should be. I mean, if you are a Republican senator, and the Democratic president has proposed something as controversial as selling F15s to Saudi Arabia, and the Republican Leader of the Senate says, "I'm going to vote for this," it provides an enormous amount of political cover.

DW: It has been suggested to me that during the time period we're talking about, that Baker could also provide political cover on a controversial vote such as the Canal Treaties to conservative Democratic senators.

JF: Oh, absolutely. If you're a Democrat from Alabama, and the Republican Leader from Tennessee votes for something, that gives you another way to cover yourself when you explain your vote at the Kiwanis Club.

DW: Do you remember any situations in which Senator Baker was a special problem for the Administration?

JF: You know, I don't. I tried to think of that, and I'm sure he had to be. I mean, he was ferocious on the breeder reactor and helped beat our efforts to undo it every time, as he was on the snail darter and that sort of stuff. But you know. Quite honestly, I would see him in private, and he would just roll his eyes over all this energy exposed and expended on the
snail darter, which—he couldn't believe that we were having to do this. But that's what his constituents wanted, so he did battle for them, and won.

DW: There was a kind of an interesting and heated fight during, I think, President Carter's first year, in regard to appointments to the Federal Election Commission. When Senator Rhodes and Senator Baker got their noses at least publicly out of joint because President Carter—I think it was in 1977, when some appointments were to be made to the Federal Election Commission, and the Republican Senate and House leaders thought they had an understanding with the Carter White House that they would appoint the Republicans to be appointed from a list submitted by those leaders, and that did not happen. And there was a bruhaha that lasted several months. But you have no recollection of that? Let's talk a little bit about relationships. Do you have any insights as to the kind of relationship that existed between Speaker O'Neill and Senator Baker during the years you were in the White House?

JF: Yes. They were—Howard Baker was an easy guy to get along with, and he and Tip, I think, had a bridge again through Ev Dirksen, who Mr. O'Neill knew, and they were very cordial to each other, and worked well together.

DW: What about the Baker-Carter relationship? They really did not know one another when Carter became President.

JF: Well, I always felt there was a lot of empathy for Carter from Baker because of a cultural kind of sameness. I mean, a lot of people in this town were not familiar with "the south" in the way that Howard Baker was. And like Mr. O'Neill. I mean, Tip, you know—he came from and where Jimmy Carter came from was almost like two different countries. Not true with Howard Baker. I mean, you grow up in Huntsville, Tennessee, it's not a very far leap to Plains, Georgia, culturally. They had a very good working relationship. I would think it too strong to say that they had a personal relationship, but they had a very good, friendly, cordial working relationship. Without rancor.

DW: As I'm sure you know, one of Senator Baker's lines oft repeated about President Carter was that he was glad to see Carter in the White House because for the first time in his memory, there was someone in the oval office who didn't speak with an accent.

JF: Yes.
DW: What about the relationship between President Carter and Senator Byrd—his leader in the Senate?

JF: Senator Byrd and Carter, I don't think, got on quite as well, even thought they were of the same party. Because Senator Byrd truly thought that the Senate was the institution that mattered, out of the three branches of government. Might be the only. And he was less likely to concede prerogatives to the executive. Where Senator Baker, I think, wanted government to "work the best way it could work." You know, again, those are questions from your Dan Tate interview, because I was not kind of between those. The relationship with Tip O'Neill I can talk about for a long time, and it was a very complicated relationship, but the relationship between Carter and Senator Byrd—I know he let him play his fiddle at the White House any time he wanted to.

DW: Can you give me the flavor of those bipartisan leadership meetings in which Senator Baker participated? And some feel as to their chemistry?

JF: Speaker O'Neill would read from a piece of paper that his assistant, a very bright kid named Harry Weiss, would prepare for him. President Carter, without any notes, would go on into the nth detail of any issue to be discussed and not, in my personal opinion, sometimes focus enough on the politics of what needed to be talked about. Whereas Senator Baker was a person who would always talk about the reality of the politic involved. If there were partisan objections to whatever issues there were, he would speak for the party. If he was in tune with the issue, he would speak to what had to be done to get the issue passed. Howard Baker was a consummate politician in all good terms. He had an anchor of beliefs and philosophical underpinnings that made him the Republican he was. But he thought government should work.

DW: How did President Carter react to Senator Baker when Senator Baker was in the position of giving President Carter advice as to what he ought to do or ought not to do?

JF: He took it. He didn't always agree with it, but he was always solicitous of advice from Howard Baker. And that grew over the years—over the four years.

DW: Was Speaker O'Neill doing the same sort of thing? Was the thrust of his comments to
provide political advice to the President?

JF: A lot of times. And after Tip got through reading his piece of paper, Tip could talk the realities of politics as good as any one in town. Tip's advice was always much more complicatedly arrived at because of the strong committee chairmen and caucus pressures and much more liberal, to the left of where most of Jimmy Carter's positions were. So, I mean, his advice sometimes was not what Jimmy Carter really wanted to hear.

DW: What about Senator Byrd at these meetings. What would be the nature of his contributions?

JF: They were always—to the point of how you had to get the Senate to go along, and the problems you had with pieces of the issue. Say if it was an energy issue, how it affected coal mines, or how it affected [big] oil, or what that did to those senators from those states that had those resources there. His contributions were always very good. I found those breakfasts to be a bit staged. I mean, everybody knew what everybody else had come to the table to say. And there was not a lot of—too many people. There'd be 30 people around this table.

DW: Was there anyone in the Senate with whom President Carter was particularly close, to your knowledge?

JF: He and Senator Hatfield were quite close. Had a lot to do, I think, with their religious common grounds.

DW: Or Evangelicals.

JF: Rather. He got on well with a lot of the southern members. But Jimmy Carter was not a back-slapping kind of Ronald Reagan personality who had a lot of close friends in Congress. He didn't before he got here; he didn't while he was here; and he doesn't now.

DW: This question may be redundant, but I'm going to ask it.

JF: That's not to mean that he did not have relationships that he worked well with, and some friendships that were very important to him, but I used to always say, Carter was the kind of
guy that, if he had some free time in the evening, instead of having a bunch of the guys come down and drink whiskey and tell jokes the way Ronald Reagan used to do, he would spend time with Amy and Rosalyn, who he considered his family. His young daughter. Which all seems quite admirable, but it didn’t help us in Congressional Liaison.

DW: What I’m trying to get a sense of is, among those in the Senate to whom Carter looked for advice, and whom he may have sought out for advice. Where did Howard Baker stand?

JF: You know, among the top 4 or 5 phone calls, if you want to rank him that way. Again, now, I was a House guy.

DW: Sure, I understand.

JF: Your interview with Dan Tate on these subjects would be more meaningful.

DW: Yes. What kind of relationship did Frank Moore have with Howard Baker, in your view?

JF: Oh, I think they had a good personal relationship. I think that Howard was probably dealing with Dan Tate a lot more because he knew him, because Tate had been on Richard Russell’s staff, from Georgia, and had known him around the Senate. And I think Baker's staff—top staff—knew and trusted Dan a lot. And there was no problem with a relationship with Frank, but in this business you are always going to deal with who you have known and who you like a lot longer. And then when it came to dealing with other people than Dan, the Republican Leader of the Senate would pick up the phone and call the president.

DW: Yes. You mentioned—going back to your story about Senator Baker calling to ask you if he could be of help—were you ever contacted by his office, asking you for help in some manner? Did that ever happen?

JF: Asking me for help? No. Not really. I mean, again, because they had such an ally in Dan.

DW: Well, I was thinking that perhaps because of the Tennessee connection, there might have been something there. How well did you know Baker's staff people?

JF: I knew most of them quite well. Jim Range, and picking the folks that were involved in
kind of local Tennessee projects, like Clinch River, and the water projects, and whatever.

DW: What did your colleagues, I'll depersonalize it, and the White House generally think of Baker's staff?

JF: Thought it was an excellent staff. I think Howard Baker was a sort of Republican that young Republicans kind of sought him out to work for him. So he had a lot of very bright, good folk.

DW: At some point, Senator Baker becomes a presidential candidate, hoping to be able to run against President Carter in 1980. Of course that didn't happen, but as his candidacy was developing, how was he seen as a prospective candidate in the White House? When people were handicapping over there, as I'm sure must have happened from time to time. How did Baker look?

JF: Oh, I think like most people inside the Beltway who are the worst at picking presidential candidates, so we all thought that he would be a great candidate, and from the other point of view, a terrible person to have to run against because he could beat us. All of those sort of thoughts. But in reality, I think those qualities that made Senator Baker such a good kind of inside-the-cloakroom leader are not the same sort of qualities that you usually have to have to win your party's nomination and win a general election and the presidency.

DW: You mentioned seeing Senator Baker with—

JF: You've got to have a hard edge. You've got to have a lot of stamina, and you've got to really be mean and tough.

DW: And Howard Baker didn't have that.

JF: I think he had that, but it didn't come out as well as it did in others. I mean, you knew that Ronald Reagan would cut your head off—because he told you that. At the same time, Reagan had this wonderful old grandfather kind of appeal about him, too, so he had the best of both. I don't think that Howard Baker was ever able to convey "I'm a tough, hard-edged leader if I need to be" to the American people. He certainly was inside the Cloakroom.
DW: Come back to that in just a moment. You made a reference to seeing Senator Baker and Mrs. Baker together, during that period of time. One of the really intriguing things about Senator Baker is that devotion to Joy, and the effect it had on his political career. Do you have any insights into that?

JF: None other than to agree with what you said. There was a devotion there for a lady who was at times ill, and he was very much devoted to her. And everybody in town knew it.

DW: You left the White House. Ronald Reagan is elected. Or reverse that. But—

JF: I'll go back to a thing I probably shouldn't bring up, but there was—in 1976, Gerry Ford picks Bob Dole to be his running mate.

DW: Correct.

JF: And if I remember correctly, in that Republican Convention, there was a lot of tussle about Gerry Ford maybe picking Howard Baker.

DW: He was one of the three finalists, as it were.

JF: And if I remember correctly, there was a strong undercurrent about Senator Baker maybe not getting on the ticket because of Joy's health. And some of that people said was flung about by the Dole people. I may be wrong on the facts. But all I know is, in 1976, when Vice Presidential Candidate Bob Dole rode into Tennessee, a lot of Republicrats, I call them, who are Republicans and Democrats and go either way, and for the most part, for the last few years since about 1964 had been Republicans, didn't like this guy. Because they thought that Bob Dole had been mean to Howard and Joy Baker. And we got a lot of votes off that in the Carter campaign in Tennessee.

DW: That's interesting. That's interesting.

JF: My personal observation is that. And my comment to one of the Tennessee papers, after Dole had come to Tennessee and campaigned, was that the Carter campaign would pay for him to return.
DW: I've heard several people talk about that and I'm not sure what role, if any, Senator Dole and his people may have had, but—

JF: And I'm not, either. I want to be clear on that. But there are all kinds of rumors, and you know how politics is.

DW: Certainly Baker people were sensitive to the fact that her problems were well-known, and while they were in Kansas City for the campaign, Jack Anderson wrote a story—no, he went on the Today Show with a story about Mrs. Baker in regard to an automobile accident she had recently had, and sort of painted it as if she were driving while intoxicated, while in fact that was not the case. But, that precipitated a lot of reaction, but based on what I know about the selection—President Ford's selection—there were other factors that were more important than whatever concerns remained there.

JF: But for the Carter campaign in Tennessee, in 1976, Bob Dole had beat our native son, Howard Baker, to be picked as vice president. Quite useful.

DW: As I was saying a moment ago, Reagan is elected, you depart the White House in the transition. Howard Baker becomes the Majority Leader. What general observations do you have on his performance as Majority Leader?

JF: He was phenomenal to have a new president in the White House and have an enormously diverse Republican majority in the Senate. It went all the way from Jesse Helms to Bob Packwood, and everything in-between. And you also had, from that 1980 election, a lot of people elected as Republicans to the Senate who were not reelected, if you know what I'm trying to say. Flukes, maybe, is the word. Who were—this Jeremiah Denton guy—you might remember him from Alabama. And I'm sure that there are a couple of lines around Howard Baker's face that he can point to and attribute directly to some of those characters. But he kept them all in a row, and was a masterful politician. And as you quite remember in the House it got a lot of publicity. But in the Senate there were a lot of Democrats that, through Howard Baker's cajoling and Ronald Reagan's enormous abilities in persuasion, brought a lot of votes to issues those first four years.

DW: In 1981 to 1985, where were you and what were you doing?
JF: Here.

DW: With Charles Walker.

JF: Yes.

DW: So you were doing a lot of business on the Senate side during that time?

JF: Doing a lot more than I had during the four years I had been in the White House, you bet. And had gone by and done business with Senator Baker and his staff, and they always were open and amenable, and sometimes would be for you and some-times be against you, but they were always pleasant in their dealings.

DW: What kind of sense did you get about the kind of power and influence Baker exercised as Leader during that time?

JF: Well, I can give you a very Tennessee and a very Jim Free example that you might recall some of these issues. There has always been an issue in the entertainment industry, which I represent—a couple of very large segments—that involved the stealing of copyrighted material, called home taping. And the home taping issue had really been, for the most part, a music issue. Because you had had blank cassette audio tapes a lot longer than you had had VCR blank tapes—VHS blank tapes. And the music industry had always tried to get something going but just never really could overcome an enormous consumer resistance. You know, the consumers don't want to pay a royalty on blank tape, and they think that they have to listen to commercials on radio, and they have to pay for a record album, and so why should they have to pay any more—quite a reasonable sounding argument unless you understand how copyright reimburses the creators and the producers. In the early 1980s, the music industry was trying again to get something going on a home taping piece of legislation. This is when everything in the industry was still analogued—you did not have digital. And about that time, my friend Jack Valenti jumped up and got a lot of publicity and press because VCRs and all of that were really coming on-line. Every home in America was getting them. And he yelled, in 1981 and 1982, that you had to now have a home taping piece of legislation on video. And got Howard Baker, who was close to Lou Wasserman, and some people in that business, kind of on board. And the music industry went to Senator Baker and made him understand that this was first and foremost a Nashville, Tennessee
music industry issue. And all he did was just to explain to Mr. Valenti and others involved that they could go forward with their video legislation, but it had to be one and the same, and the same piece of legislation with remedies for music and audio, too. And that bill didn't go any-where, but it began a fight that finally culminated and ended with the passage of the 1992 home taping legislation. The main thing that finally caused it to pass was that we all moved to digital, which became a real threat and more people understood that you had to do something to protect copyright. But one of the original helps, if you will in that road for the music industry, and getting some remedy, was Howard Baker telling the movie guys, "Fine, but music has to be part of it."

DW: Did you have the impression that Senator Baker could get at least some of his Republican colleagues to do something that they might not want to do, simply because he was the leader and wanted them to act in a certain way?

JF: Well certainly. I mean, any leader can do that, or he's not a leader.

DW: What was it about Senator Baker—and the position he held—that was at work here, if you can kind of personalize it a little bit?

JF: Well, as we've said already, it was a combination of substance and understanding, and having been around this town his entire life, and understanding how the levers of power worked, and being able to be a pleasant sort of guy that people liked and would take a chance for.

DW: Do you still see Senator Baker from time to time?

JF: Haven't seen him lately. Used to see him still. You know, at different functions. But I haven't seen him, now, in I guess it's been a couple of years. See him on TV every once in a while.

DW: Yes, he pops up every now and then. Well, is there anything that needs to be said that hasn't been discussed, or any stories that need to be told that haven't been told?

JF: Well, again, the last personal story is that when the campaign was over in 1980 and Carter lost, one of the first phone calls I got, between the election and Christmas, you know,
Thanksgiving-ish, first of December time of the year, was from Senator Baker, just inquiring on how I was doing and what I had planned, and could he be of any help. So, he met me at the door and then was there when I went out the back door.

DW: That's interesting. Well, with that, let me say thanks for a very interesting and informative conversation.

JF: Thank you.

END OF TAPE