
Interview with Lee Verstandig

The interview was conducted by David Welborn in Washington, DC on August 12, 1994

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INTerview: Lee L. Verstandig

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BOX 19, FOLDER 7

DW: We appreciate the opportunity to come visit this morning about Senator Howard Baker. Let me begin by asking you to briefly trace the path you took that led you to a staff position in the office of Senator John Chafee in 1977.

LV: It's a twisted path a bit, David, but you will appreciate it. I was pursuing a PhD at Brown in American History, and while I was pursuing that, I was like many graduate students, teaching. I was teaching Political History and Science at a small college in Rhode Island, and in doing so, got involved in teaching courses in polling and political behavior, and as a result, got my students, as many others do, to get involved in the polling process to get a better understanding of the political process, etc., in the early 1960s, from probably 1962 to about 1968. In doing so, I got therefore involved with a number of politicians in the state to do polling—Republicans and Democrats. I've done work at that time for Senator Pell, who was in his first term, for several Democratic governors and mayors in the state, which was at that time predominantly a Democratic state. Senator Chafee was the minority leader of the House of Representatives, at the time, and I worked with him in his first campaign in 1962, in which he was the first Republican elected. But I sort of maintained a bipartisanship and worked for both parties, principally on polling, and then I did a lot of campaign management—ran campaigns and did a lot of other kinds of things. As a result, I ended up being invited to go to the Democratic National Convention in 1968 for Claiborne Pell, and also being asked by Governor Chafee to go to Miami. I finally had to make a decision. I went to Miami. I guess the convention was probably safer in Miami than Chicago, but as a result, I sort of put my mark down publicly as a Republican. In 1968, Chafee, as I recall, was defeated for his fourth term on a tax issue and was going to practice law. He was appointed by Richard Nixon as Secretary of the Navy, and he served there for about three years. At that time I was teaching and working on my PhD. In 1972, Chafee decided to run for the United States Senate against Claiborne Pell. I was not involved in it. At that time I was doing dissertation research and didn't have time for that. I had finished my PhD in 1970 and I become an Assistant Dean of Academic Affairs at Brown, and used
that as an argument, really, not to get involved in politics— as an administrator. The election was very close; it was hotly contested. Chafee ran ahead by a small percentage point in October points. His advisors urged him and Senator Pell both to literally "take off their jackets, roll up their sleeves, and get in the gutter and fight this to the end." That concept was alien to both of those people. Chafee lost the race in a closely contested race, and went to practice law again. So I stayed out of politics really from 1970 to 1976. In 1976, John Chafee came to me when I was Dean at Brown University, having worked with him when he was governor, but not having worked in the 1972 campaign, and said, "I'd like you to come in and help put together my campaign, and I really want to give you full discretion to put together what you think is necessary. My only qualification is I don't want anyone who was involved in the 1972 campaign." So, having been a Dean and not been involved, I guess it was safe. I did that. I put together a steering committee, put together a number of people. One of the people that later had a Howard Baker relationship was Bailey-Dierdorf consulting firm, which principally represented moderate Republicans. And I did that in large part because Brown, like a lot of universities then, I guess still today, the students graduate in May or early June and they don't come back until mid-September, and as an administrator, while we spend the time getting caught up, there's more time. So I got involved in putting the campaign together, working particularly with the issues group people and the steering committee, and being a liaison with the polling people and the Bailey-Dierdorf consulting people. The day after the election—this was a seat that had been held by Senator John O. Pastore, so it was an open seat— the day after the election John came by the house and said, "Now that I've won, I need you to go to Washington with me. Would you come down and help me get organized?" I went to the then President of the university and asked for a leave of absence for six months, and proceeded to come down in December for orientations with the new senators, which obviously, at that point, had included Howard Baker, who was in the Senate. And we spent some considerable time planning the organization in January of 1977 I came down. First was his Legislative Director, then was his Administrative Assistant. And one of the early relationships, I guess, with Howard was that Howard served on the Senate Environment Public Works Committee. And Chafee elected to serve on that committee as he currently does, and originally Chafee was also on the Labor and Human Resources Committee. A year later we shifted to the Finance Committee. So my initial professional relationships were with Howard in that capacity, but I had met Howard Baker on a number of occasions in the 1960s—I guess in part because as Howard liked to continue to say, I was a "favorite son." The favorite son criteria is that I was born in Memphis; my father went to medical school in
Memphis, and I lived there for about four years. But I guess if you're born in Memphis, or born in Tennessee, you're a native son. I did go to graduate school at The University of Tennessee in Knoxville in 1961 and have a Masters degree in History.

DW: I want to come back to that in just a moment. But there is a similar story that I always thought was amusing and has to do with a former Baker staff member. And I can't for the moment remember which one it was. But who had been asked to consider a position on Senator Baker's staff and had his interview with Senator Baker. He was an Ohioan, I think, in terms of his upbringing. And they had a little chat, and at the end of the conversations, the senator asked this person whether he had any Tennessee connections. And the fellow aid, "Well, I understand that I was, although my parents did not live in Tennessee, I was conceived in Kingsport." Baker thought for a minute and nodded his head, and he said, "That'll just have to do."

LV: I'm sure that was fine. That's the best we can do.

DW: What brought you to The University of Tennessee to do graduate work in history?

LV: I have a Bachelor's degree from Franklin & Marshall College in History. And, looking ahead, having been a Dean advising students later, I was in that Catch 22 with a lot of college seniors to try and decide what do you want to do, and in at least the 1960s and 1970s, there were always the questions "Do you want to go to graduate school? Or do you go to law school? Or do you go to medical school?" And there were some who clearly decided they didn't want to, and they went out in the business world. I thought I wanted to go to law school at first, and I thought about that, and I went to the University of Richmond Law School. After about two months, I decided that this was not for me, and I took up the job teaching at a private school in Richmond, and enjoyed it. And I said "This is what I really want to do." So—and that was probably in March or so—so rather than running around and trying to figure out where I would go, I decided that I would go down to Knoxville because I knew a little bit about the department. So I went down there and spent the year there, and while I was there decided that this was something I really wanted to do in terms of teaching. So I decided I wanted to pursue a PhD, and I applied to three schools; I remember Duke and Brown and I forgot where else, but I principally went to Brown because I wanted to do my PhD work in early American political history. There was a guy there then named Forrest McDonald, who is my thesis advisor—he is a kind of a crazy
guy—he's now in Alabama, I think. And also because Brown has the John Carter Brown Library, which is the largest collection of documents and stuff up to 1800. So I went there, and began to work with Forrest, and I was particularly intrigued in a lot of period of his expertise, and in doing one particular graduate program, graduate course, studied the presidential election of 1796, and was very intrigued about how, at that time as you know, the electoral college decided this thing by 3 votes. So I began to kind of investigate that and, as a result, began to get into the question of how do these people play the political affiliations that they obviously did to enable Adams to hold the seat for the Federalists. So, moving ahead, what I ended up doing my dissertation on was to do a political history—pick one state and do one a political history of a state as a microcosm in the period, really, broadly from 1776 to 1800—but really from 1789 to 1800, really, covering the Washington-Adams administration. And I picked the State of Maryland—in large part because it did have factions that were both Republican and Federal, as they used to call them Chesapeake and Potomac parties. So I got very much involved in all that, and I think in part just because of my own political interest. And one of the more interesting parts of the dissertation, which some of the scholars on my committee early on didn't agree with were that I had several sections of the dissertation talking about political campaigning. So one of the arguments is "How can you tell us how those 'founding fathers' campaigned?" While there were some very interesting, as you might imagine, letters and diaries about some of the ways in which people campaigned, and I was reminded of it because in 1960, when I was in Knoxville, I went out into the back country of Knoxville watching guys hand out small bottles of booze in the 1960 presidential election. So my view was it hadn't changed from 1796 to 1960.

DW: By the way, have you ever encountered someone named Emory Evans—an historian, who works the Colonial period also. Emory was the Head of the History Department at College Park for quite a few years. He has just stepped down from that.

LV: The name's familiar. I must say, having made this move from academic to administration to government, I have not followed a lot of the people who are scholars in the field.

DW: Well, you lasted longer in law school than I did. I think it was 3½ weeks in my case, before I made the decision.

LV: When I became a Dean, advising students, I kept saying, "You know, if you're not sure, try
it. If you're not afraid to try it." So I tried it.

DW: Do you remember some of the people you studied with when you were in Knoxville?

LV: Yup. As I mentioned earlier, I took courses from Leroy Graf. One of the young guys, who had just come there then was John Muldowney, who I did my Masters thesis with. Larry Silverman, who was the Russian historian, became a good friend and in fact, whom I became friends of Andy Holt, and I know that I had some influence on getting Larry's attention to Andy Holt as a future administrator. And there was a guy named Glenn Miller, and—I can't think of the others right now. I took about six different people there.

DW: I don't know whether you know it or not, but Leroy died about a year ago.

LV: Oh yes, we talked about that.

DW: And John Muldowney is still there. He is now Dean of Summer School.

LV: Right. I've talked to John. I told Hillary when I left UT, I gave a little bit of money to the department. My father has several major stipends and awards at Memphis, and in fact he has one that is called—which Howard Baker knows well—called the Verstandig Award, which is given, then each quarter, now each year, to that medical student who overcomes the greatest obstacles in obtaining his or her medical degree. And it's selected by the students. I try to go down whenever I can to Memphis. He also has a big lectureship program that he brings in outstanding people in the field once a year, in October. But I liked that idea and I was very impressed with the kind of things that people have done. So I gave a little bit of money to the History Department, particularly in the areas of mid-term American History and Russian History, which originally turned out to be several hundred dollars to help people. But as I said to Hillary, and I talked once to Leroy about this—they have not managed it very well. There's probably a lot of money there, since it was 30 years ago. I had forgotten about it until last year when I got a short note from some fellow who was obviously the recipient of this stipend, and he unfortunately wrote to me about what he was working on. Had absolutely nothing to do with either these fields or frankly even history. So I called up John Muldowney, who I have known well, and I said, "What is going on here?" And I said, "Do I have to call Johnston? Who do I have to call about this? I'm sort of embarrassed." Well they began to go do some work on this and in fact, John was up here for some historical meeting in Washington, and we talked. I don't know what
the result of it is, but some day I'll get back down there and find out what happened to it, because I really think, thinking back as a graduate student, the department is always looking for small stipends to be able to help people. I thought I had it. It must be worth something now, but I don't think they've done anything with it.

DW: When I get back, I'll call John and tell him he needs to file a report, anyway.

LV: Yes, please tell him. Please tell him. Hillary is interested.

DW: That's right. You mentioned that you had had some contact with Senator Baker during the 1960s. What was the occasion of that contact?

LV: I can't really remember, David. It seems to me they were infrequent—like, you know, Baker traveling to Rhode Island for fundraising events, political events. The reason I say that is, not only did we hit off an early relationship in the Senate, even though I was Chafee's chief of staff—but there were recollections. Now part of those may be Howard Baker's affinity for pulling in Tennessee people, but the other thing is, I know very well that he knew that my father had met him on other occasions. My father was a good friend of Andy Holt's. When I was down there in Knoxville, I spent time out there; I dated one of his daughters for awhile, casually. So I think there was sort of informal kind of—but not—I can't think of when I first met the guy.

DW: Yes. Was your father the sort of person who would be involved in campaign politics in any way whatsoever?

LV: No.

DW: So there would not have been a connection—

LV: He was a doctor.

DW: Did Senator Baker play any role in Senator Chafee's campaign in 1976?

LV: I don't believe so. I can tell you later he played a major role in Howard Baker's election as majority leader. But there's not a quid pro quo there. I don't remember that, no.
DW: No. Well, that's the next question. You and Senator Chafee arrive in Washington, and one of the first things that confronts you is the leadership contest on the Republican side of—

LV: In 77.

DW: In 1977.

LV: I was thinking more of 1908, but— I don't remember as much about that. As you know, when these guys are freshmen, they are a little bit nervous—they are not sure what side to be on. In fact, just thinking back, I can't even tell you the details of the minority leadership, but I do remember— Let me back up and suggest this. And I can't give you a time line on this. One of the things that I did when I came to Washington is I quickly, after putting the office together and hiring staff—I started out, while the A.A., I started out being the staff guy to the Environment Public Works Committee, because I didn't have anyone there. You will appreciate this, because Chafee early on, within the first week or so, introduced me to Senator Moynihan, who was also a freshman, and said, "Pat, Lee is one of your kind of guys. He's a PhD and he's a Dean at Brown." Ever since that day, to this day, Patrick Moynihan refers to me as Dean. My wife testified a couple of months ago at a hearing, as an Assistant Secretary, and Moynihan sees her and looks at her and says, "And how's the Dean?" And this Assistant Secretary walked out in the hall and said, "Who is he talking about?" Well, I wasn't married to my wife when I was a dean, so she said, "Well, it's a long story." But anyhow, we worked very closely with—I mean I worked with Chafee in part because we didn't have Environment staff. He had a couple people--Jim Range and a couple others that we worked with. But the other thing I was going to tell you—early on it was clear to me that there were really three types of A.A.s in the Senate. There was the personal friend/political crony, if you will, of the Senator. There was the person who was an administrative officer and sort of in the military sense could run the office, and thirdly there was the policy person, the person that was really substantive in policy. Then there was really a fourth one—and that is one that encompassed all three of those. And I was very intrigued by the differences. So I went to work and helped to pull together a small group of AAs most of whom were new freshmen senators who fit that fourth category. And they included Dick Lugar—and they were very different politically and geographically—Dick Lugar, Al Simpson, Thad Cochran, Howard Baker, Jack Danforth——you see what's emerging here—and there may have been one other. And we used to meet once a week; usually we met in the Senate dining room for breakfast. And I say this to you because one
of the things that we soon realized—oh, Mark Hatfield's AA—that we brought into that—I think I've got all of them—I may have to back and look, but—what we would do is a sit-down breakfast, and we would talk about issues, that were of interest, that were pending or they were coming up, and would try to get a sense because they were conservatives, they were liberals, they were easterners, they were westerners—and get a sense of what could be done. What was going to happen. As this moved along—and Jim Cannon was Howard's AA at the time—and we can talk about Jim—are these other guys are very policy oriented, and so it got to the point that Jim Cannon used to joke that Howard Baker would hold off his Wednesday morning kind of senior staff meeting until Cannon came back from this breakfast, to hear what these folks had to say about what some of the issues were that were forthcoming. Having said that, when you take a look at those people you begin to look at those people who were or came to be very close political allies and associates of Howard Baker. And as I recall early on in the leadership election, the issue was, you know, and I don't even remember who was running for the leadership at the time, beside Howard Baker, who were the people that—

DW: It was Robert Griffith of Michigan, who had been the whip under Scott.

LV: That's right. And I clearly remember talking on several occasions to Chafee, and Chafee was just so impressed with Howard, beside my personal bias, but I mean professionally, that he really felt comfortable, but that's not to say that he wouldn't have felt comfortable with Griffith. But it was pretty clear to me early on that Howard Baker really represented the kind of leadership and issues that Chafee would reflect.

DW: Did Chafee know Baker personally before he was elected, do you know?

LV: I don't know that. I'm sure they had met, but I don't know, for example, when he was Secretary of the Navy, whether they had had much occasion. Howard obviously was here at the time.

DW: Well, the story is that—this may or may not trigger a memory—is that having tried twice and lost, Baker was reluctant to try for the leadership position again in 1977. And up to the very last moment—up to the moment he entered the caucus room. One thing that had happened, and I'm not sure whether it was the morning of the caucus or the previous morning, that at the last moment the incoming freshmen were having a breakfast meeting,
and Senator Chafee would have been there—Senator Lugar and others—and at the urging of Senator Domenici, who said to Baker, "Look, whether you decide or not, you really need to go talk to this group. Because Griffith had been over and talked to them." So Baker went over and met with this group, and then when he walked into the caucus room, he made a decision that he had a chance. So he gave the nod to Senator Mathias, who then nominated him. This had been prearranged. And those who were closely involved in that and trying to figure out where the votes were, say that he got—I think there were seven freshmen Republican senators, something like that—

LV: Good, good. Yup.

DW: But he got every one of those votes. And he won by one vote.

LV: Well, I can tell you this because I have told the story to Jim Cannon. I remember going over from the Dirksen Building to the Capitol, and Chafee had really not committed himself to anyone including me, and I had pressed him over there off the floor, and he said to me that he would vote for Howard Baker. So I don't care who gets credit for the one vote—some guys who came in late, and he certainly was among those, I know that. But the other thing is—the other piece here is—remember that in the Environment Public Works Committee, the order of where these fellows were seated, Baker sat to the left of Domenici, and Chafee, as the freshman Republican, sat to the left of him. So those three—you know how this thing goes, when you're sitting working together for years you really have all kinds of— They started out, is my point, those three guys started out being close in proximity on that committee together.

DW: Do you recall what, in those early days, Senator Chafee commenting on what impressed him, or what he saw in Senator Baker? Perhaps it would be fair to ask you how their relationship developed over the years.

LV: It's hard for me to pinpoint this. I think that, for example, on environmental issues, while they may not have agreed, I guess, on the snail darter entirely, but I mean, watching Baker—let me back up and say this, too. Chafee having been a state legislator, but having spent four terms as governor and having been Secretary of the Navy, I have said often to other people, including Chuck Robbin and others who were governors, that it is very difficult for a former governor to be a senator, because they go from being very important and attracting
a lot of interest for whatever they think of, to being the bottom guy on the pole. I mean John Chafee once said that driving home (there's not a governor's residence), driving home from the State House to his home he came up with the idea of creating a state junior college system. Picked up the phone when he got home, and called up a bunch of people, and said, "I want to meet on Monday." And within several months there was a state system. You don't do that when you are a senator, or a junior senator. And I think part of it was that Chafee had been a legislator but he had also been a governor and an executive in the federal government, and I think he—just my view of watching behind them on the Environment Committee for some time—watching them, I think Chafee had some incredible respect for this guy's legislative acumen. Working through bills, working through amendments, working through different aspects of legislation for a guy who was rather senior but obviously cared about his committee responsibilities, which I think is hard for leadership to do. So I think he saw that, and I think as you look back today, looking back, Chafee has really become an extraordinary legislator, because he is very committed to the substance and the detail in public policy. I think he—and Domenici is like that, too—but as you know, there are some others who are not quite as much as that. I think that he picked up very early on that this fellow really understood these issues, really studied these issues, while he had good staff he made judgment decisions for himself. And I think that had an early influence on Chafee. I think in terms of his fairness, I think Chafee was always—because Chafee is a very ethical, fair-minded guy—I think he was always very high on the way Howard Baker treated people, dealt with people, gave people opportunities to talk or to disagree—and that's something that would be important to John Chafee.

DW: I want to come back to some of these matters later on, but Senator Chafee saw the leadership position in 1979 as Conference Secretary.

LV: Right.

DW: What do you recall about that? Why did he run? What was the campaign like? What role, if any, did Senator Baker play?

LV: I think part of that was the geographic balance game—east, west, north, south, moderate, conservative. I think part of that was—I don't think Chafee aggressively sought that. That's not John's style. I do know that Howard Baker did talk with him and did urge him, and thought that he would be a balance to that leadership. Because I remember—and you're
going to have to understand John Chafee—but I remember John's kind of reluctance to campaigning for a leadership position. I drove it more than he did. I mean, I helped him draft letters to his colleagues, and I followed up with the AAs that I knew, and we had a very close relationship with the AAs, particularly this class of 1977. He was rather reluctant to do that, which is John's style. So I don't mean to say this was a senator working his way up the leadership ladder, aspiring to be majority leader or something. And I think he took encouragement from Howard—I mean I know he took encouragement, because I remember some hallway conversations with Senator Baker. I remember conversations with Cannon, personally, sort of saying, "I think this would be good for John. I think this would be good for the Republican party. Howard is working on that. We need to do that. You need to talk with Lugar's AA, and Jack Danforth's AA, and some of these others. And so I think it's clear that this was not something he went after. Looking back at some of the other leadership races that I've seen since, this was not a well-organized machine, by any means. And kind of fell into it. I mean, he took it and I think he did a good job. I think the reason he's not there today is for the same political reasons—there is a question of political balance and ideology, and I think getting knocked out of that whenever it was last year, probably hurt him a bit, because he did carry himself with some of the leadership's stature which was really a rather cohesive group, with Cochran and Dole and others. But I noticed that in a different way because when I was at the White House, I would see the leadership at meetings at the White House, and I would see John and others, and I would see him grow in terms of the stature of being in the leadership. So my point is he didn't aggressively go after this; I really do think Howard was somewhat—to what extent I don't know—but I know personally he was influential in urging him to— As you know, Howard Baker is very persuasive. I'm trying to think back—it reminds me—in 1978, I think, Senator Pell was up for reelection, and Howard Baker leaned on me to try to get me to run against Pell.

DW: Oh, is that right?

LV: And I said, "Howard, I've done a lot of campaigns in Rhode Island. I know the Democratic party very well in Rhode Island. I know Claiborne Pell. And there's no way—no one can beat him." And of course, having said that, I ended up being, and as you may know, one of the great things that Howard Baker, I think, did for the Republican party is, he spent an inordinate amount of time in candidate recruitment. A lot of time. And I know because I remember bringing through several Republican candidates—and I forgot even the fellow's name, now, that ran—but one of the kind of conditions was if this fellow's running, he said
to Chafee, "I want Lee to spend some time with this guy." So in a way we had the assistance of the leader, but I knew what he was saying—that he figured that I knew the state well, and that if I wasn't going to run, at least I was going to have some way of trying to assist this fellow.

DW: Describe in a little more detail, if you could, how Senator Baker worked on you, in regard to this proposition—in you running for the Senate.

LV: Well, I don't think—I'm trying to think back—I hadn't thought of it in a while—I don't think it was heavy-handed, by any means. As I recall it, Jim Cannon and a couple of other people, and Cannon as you know was very much involved in these kinds of things—who can beat them, who's up there talking a lot about—give me some names of people—and knowing Jim, he probably threw some of those names to John Chafee to see what John thought. And I think an early conclusion was, either because there were no candidates or they weren't great candidates, maybe Lee's the right guy. He's been around a number of years; he's got some credibility. And I remember at least one if not two conversations with Baker, in which he said, "You know, you could do this. We'd love to have you down here." And I remember saying, "I'm not sure that I want to be a United States senator, but I'm more sure that no one that I know of at the present time can beat Claiborne Pell." And I was happy doing what I was doing. I vividly remember saying to Baker, "When I came to Washington with Chafee in 1977 and kind of walked the halls of Congress as a political historian, it was walking 6 inches off the ground all the time, in terms of what was here." And he said, "Well, think of how much more--how better you'd feel--how higher you'd walk if you were a United States senator." So, it wasn't something that he badgered me about—maybe a couple conversations. But Jim Cannon certainly kept on me, because we were trying to figure out—naturally they were trying to find the right candidates, and obviously they wanted to find the best they could get, and there were some questions of 'Who is the right person up there?'

DW: Were the conversations you had with Baker in his office, or upon encountering one another in the corridor, or do you recall the circumstances?

LV: Yes. Well, and this carried when I was at Transportation, but I don't know. I can't tell whether it is just Howard Baker's style, and sort of warmth, or whether it was my relationship with Jim Cannon, or whether it was the emerging relationship that Chafee had
and others like Chafee—Danforth and Lugar and others. I spent a considerable amount of
time in the Republican leader's office—for different reasons. But I always felt welcome
there. I knew the staff well—I got to know the staff well—and so it wasn't unusual to see
Howard to chat with him, to sit down in the back room on something. More so than—in
fact, I don't know that I ever set foot, maybe once or twice in Baker's office in the Dirksen.

DW: Neither did he!

LV: Maybe that's why. But I knew some of the staff over there, you know. And I spent a lot of
time also in that—when I was Assistant Secretary of Transportation—in that room upstairs
in which Tommy Griscom and Ron McMahan and those people operated. But no, while he
was the Republican senators' leader, I figured that he and I became closer, maybe in part
because I saw a lot of him. I got to know Cissy well. I got to know Joy very well. And I
can't think of the timing of this, so while I remember it, I'll tell you. At one point when Joy
was on the Board of Trustees at Mount Vernon College, and Cissy was still a student, I
think, there was a search for a president of Mount Vernon College. And unbeknownst to
me, Joy Baker submitted my name. So at one point I got these letters from the committee
and—I can understand, because when I was a Dean, I was considered for jobs like college
presidencies and stuff like that, so I thought—well. And then coincidentally, someone, and
I can't tell you whether it was Howard Baker or Cissy, or somebody, said, "Oh yah, Joy put
your name in." So then I felt even more guilty that I ought to pursue it; if she thought that
much of me, I'd better do this. So I literally went through to the final four, and at one point I
remember talking to Joy, and she said, "You bring a dimension for a small college like
that." They had just gone from a small junior college to college—and the coed issue and
stuff like that that Brown had been through, and I understood that. And she said, "You
know, I really would like to see you go through with this—at least so the committee people
understand your perspective and dimension on some of these things." So the Baker
influence, again, had some influence.

DW: How did you come to know the Baker family?

LV: I can't remember. I can't remember. It had to be Senate-related things. Although as that got
further along, we would see a lot of them at parties, and at their house, and in fact (and I
can't remember dates again), but in 1979, I think, I have a photograph of Howard Baker
standing between my wife and me—my current wife. Before I had married her, which was
two years later, at some fundraising event in Georgetown. But every time I would see him
or Joy, it was always, "Let's get together." Sometimes we went out to dinner with Ron and
some of these other people. So it became much more of a—I don't know—I wouldn't say it
was a Tennessee mafia, by any means, but I think there was a comfort level, and I think
clearly, right from the very beginning, he knew and they knew that I was obviously very
supportive, not only personally but philosophically and everything else. So I was sort of a
natural ally.

DW: I want to go back and just check something with you regarding something you said before.
You talked about going to the convention in Miami in 1968, and Senator Baker, although
just in the Senate, was speculated to be one of those under serious consideration for the
vice-presidential nomination.

LV: Gee, right.

DW: Do you have any recollection of that?

LV: Not until you said that, no I don't. John Chafee was a big Nelson Rockefeller ally. In fact,
in the—uh, Lyndon Johnson's speech, where he decided not to run was in January or
February—

DW: March.

LV: March of 1968.

DW: March of 68.

LV: I had conducted a survey at the college on presidential preferences. Just one of the things I
was doing, and I used to be a sort of television commentator for these kinds of things. In
fact the fellow who is the NBC guy in New York City--I can't remember right now--was the
guy who was on the Rhode Island NBC affiliate. But I used to do these things periodically.
And I remember, at the urging of one of the kids, sending this survey of preference
candidates to the White House. I didn't know anything about the White House. Well, about
two weeks later I got a phone call, which, as you can imagine in a department stuns the
department. The White House is calling. And they had read this thing, among others, and
my data pointed out clearly what everybody else said, that the public preference was not for this guy. And as a result on some television stuff, Chafee suggested that, through someone at that time in 1968, that maybe one ought to be done like this for Rockefeller. And I remember doing one for Rockefeller, and I remember Rockefeller being in Rhode Island in the spring of 1968, and having 10 minutes to talk about that. Having said all that, Chafee really went to Miami as a Rockefeller guy, early on.

DW: That comment prompts me to ask, "Did you know Jim Cannon before you came down to Washington?"

LV: Yes. Jim and I just recently talked about this. In November, I think, of 75, I was approached about a couple of jobs in the Ford Administration. There was a guy named Jerry Jones in the Ford Administration—I forgot what his title was, but he was in the West Wing. And I can't even tell you how this happened, but anyhow, I came down here and was interviewed by Jones, and I can't even think now whether he was White House personnel—I don't know. Initially I was considered for the Assistant Secretary for Higher Education with David Matthews of Alabama. And met with Matthews and some other people. And that went on for awhile. And in December I was called down to the White House again and I was interviewed by a couple of people, one of whom was Jim Cannon, for a job on the Domestic Council. And I kept saying to the White House personnel people, "I need to know whether you folks are going to make an offer to me, because the academic year starts like the 10th or 12th of January and I really can't leave these people in the lurch in the mid-year. And of course, knowing government in the White House, they were going to make it when they could make it. Which they didn't make until—I don't know—March, or something like that. And at that time they did offer me a position on the Domestic Council staff. I had only talked to Jim briefly, but Jim clearly remembered when I came down here that he had met me at that time in the White House.

DW: I asked that because of your comments about Senator Rockefeller—I mean the Governor Rockefeller—and also because, from your previous comments, in any case, you sort of had a special relationship with Cannon. Would you describe it that way?

LV: We have. Cannon is one of the most astute political people I've ever met. I mean, I know that early on, when he worked for Howard, there were some people, and I don't even remember who was Howard's Chief of Staff before—I had met the guy and obviously, I am
forgetting it now.

DW: But just for the record, in the Tennessee office, his AA—and there was always some confusion about this—was a fellow named Hugh Branson.

LV: Right. Exactly. But he worked up here, early on.

DW: Yes. He came up—

LV: Because he used to be in the Dirksen-Baker office. That's where you could find him.

DW: Yes, that's right.

LV: But I've always had a lot of respect for Jim Cannon because I think he really uniquely fit—whether this is applicable today—he uniquely fit the kind of person that a senator ought to have as an AA. Although Jim never cared about the management side—but we've all come to learn that there are a lot—with computers and everything else, there are other kinds of people that can do that. But Jim really had a lot of experience—very balanced, very objective, but very precise in his ability to listen to people and to evaluate things, and I think certainly Howard must have had the same sense of value in terms of their relationship. I think that early on I remember a little bit of friction between—the Secretary of the Senate, help me—Bill Hildenbrand, who I knew well, sort of who's advising whom, and yet, Cannon had that kind of political judgment. Cannon spent, as you know, a lot of time talking with foreign dignitaries who Howard Baker really liked to understand. Jim was kind of a filter, sometimes. And, as I said, we had breakfast together in groups, and I always felt free to go in and chat, and if there were issues that I knew that Senator Chafee was concerned about, interested in, I spent a lot of time talking to him. And my view of how this works is if you have—if the bosses have that kind of relationships, the senior staff people ought to, because they could do so much to facilitate that relationship. And particularly sometimes these senators, until they have been around longer—guys like Chafee—are really reluctant to go to someone like Howard Baker on the floor and say, "Howard, I've got a problem." But if some of us can raise the problem and figure out how to solve the problem, particularly because we know the Senator well, as did Jim, we'd be able to say, "Oh, I'm sure that's an issue that Howard would love to hear about," or "Don't
bother him now about it, but you and I can work it out." So we worked very, very closely
together, and really had a lot of respect for each other. His wife and mine—we socialized a
bit together. And that carried over when I went to the White House—it carried over when I
was in Transportation, but it carried over in the White House because I was always more
fascinated as I got into the White House to understand the role he played, because my office
in the White House was on the same floor next door to the then (early 1980s) current
Assistant to the President for domestic policy. So I looked at the domestic policy side
differently than I did when I knew Howard in the late 70s. But I always thought his
judgment, his demeanor, his ability to—in meetings in which generally there are principles
only, Jim was a guy who could fit in and not be perceived to be staff. And I think for that
reason he had incredible credibility with the senators that worked with Howard—even those
that may not have agreed all the time, I think that he played a very extraordinary role
because he really represented the Senator. Not that he ever kind of said, "You need to go
through me." I don't think he ever did that, but I think that senators came to view him as a
guy that—they could measure Howard Baker. And differently, for example, from Ron
McMahan, or even later, Tommy Griscom. Both of whom probably knew Baker better and
differently, but on substantive policy issues, Jim really understood Howard Baker.

DW: I understand that Bill Hildenbrand was something of the same sort, in that, along with
Cannon, distinct from other Baker staff people, he could deal with other senators, not quite
as a peer but almost as a peer.

LV: Yes. And I think you're absolutely right. And Bill, to some extent like Howard Green
today, who is his deputy, but not quite. I mean Hildenbrand fit different stature, and I think
part of what it is, is that the rules and procedures of the Senate are so complicated anyhow,
it takes a long time to understand them. And Howard Baker certainly understands. But I
think many times the senators turned to Bill Hildenbrand because they really didn't
understand what they could or couldn't do, sometimes. And so he was a resource, I guess is
the right word. But you're right. There was a very close collegial relationship. And really it
was sort of Mr. In and Mr. Out, because Hildenbrand was always the resource guy on the
floor. Jim Cannon rarely ever—you rarely ever saw Jim on the floor. I don't know whether
we'd ever go through and look at tapes or something—although Jim Cannon was a big
advocate when we had all those debates about whether the Senate should have talk
television. And I'm sure that—I remember now that I would see Cannon on occasion in the
Cloakroom, but I really remember seeing Jim on the floor. I'm sure he was, but—a different
DW: Could you characterize for me how Senator Baker interacted with Cannon and Hildenbrand—you know, if you were in a room in a meeting where there was one or the other of them—with Senator Baker. What were those relationships like?

LV: Well, there's another element in there, sometimes, and that's Howard Leavingood. Was becoming a good friend. But I would say Cannon tended to be a little more laid back. I always got the impression that if you were talking about an issue of concern with those three or four sitting around a table, Hildenbrand would be more direct. Jim, while he might speak up, I always had the impression that Jim felt that he could talk to Howard Baker, privately sometimes. And didn't need to air nuances or disagreements with too many other people. I guess that's how I would characterize—he wasn't a 'pound your fist on the table' and say, "Senator, I don't agree with that," or "I don't think you really feel that way." I am not saying Hildenbrand would say that. But if there was a particular issue, Hildenbrand might be more forceful than Jim Cannon, in that kind of a situation. So I think that—that's why I say, he's a model. Maybe he's a different model from leadership. It's a model that I think is important for senators and their Chiefs of Staff. And sometimes you have them and sometimes you don't. And it's not simply the political cronyism. I mean there are guys up there—Senator Cochran's AA is a good friend and came in that class—was his AA on the House side; they'd grown up together; they're very close friends. But he is really Thad Cochran's political guy. Jack Danforth's first AA, who has become a good friend, went to high school and college with Jack, worked when Jack was Attorney General, and knows how the man thinks. Kind of like Jim. But you don't see him. And I sort of saw that in my relationship with Chafee. You're there to provide it but you don't have to force yourself on it, but you've got a personal relationship that when you need to, I remember with Chafee on the first AWACS vote in 1978 or 1979, a lot of pressure from the Jewish community; Rhode Island has always been supportive of Chafee, and I was doing some of Chafee's intelligence stuff. Chafee came down and voted for the sale—Saudi sale—and we took a lot of flak from some of the leaders in the Jewish community, one of whom was on his steering committee who later became a federal judge. But it was one of those things where I felt I could sit down and say, "Here's what I know." And Chafee could do with it what he wants, but you could be hurt. I think Jim Cannon and Howard always had that, and I think it was more private. I think even as, again jumping ahead, as you moved into that sort of 1980 presidential campaign and Howard's thinking on that, I think Jim added a great deal to that.
Jim had some real concerns which I think were correct, but he had the ability to do that. He didn't necessarily do it in a large crowd.

DW: In the first few months of 1977, did you have any encounters with Lamar Alexander?

LV: I don't remember. I know Lamar well, and it's one of those questions like you really don't remember--where did it start? I don't recall. I really don't.

DW: Let me refresh your memory as to the circumstances. Lamar had just lost his first campaign for governor.

LV: Okay.

DW: And—I think I'm correct on that. Senator Baker is elected Republican leader. He asks Lamar to come up, only for a period of time, to help him organize his office.

LV: Right.

DW: And I think Lamar was up here for about 3-4 months, early in 1977, and he gets credit for getting Baker and Jim Cannon together, incidentally, and sort of setting up the leader's office. So, as I say, I was curious as to whether you had any recollection of him in that time period.

LV: I tell you. In December, as you know, there is a sort of traditional thing where the newly elected both Republican and Democratic senators come down and sort of get orientation. And that's where I first met Leavingood and Bill Hildenbrand, and I think—think—that is when I first met Lamar. But I think it was like December 18th or something, shortly before the Christmas holidays. Because one of the things I learned from this is—Hildenbrand put this wonderful orientation on about procedures and stuff, and how do you organize your office and everything else. Two years later, when the next Republican class came in, I decided to put together a different kind of meeting because I thought, "All this is interesting but it goes over everybody's head—the senators' head." And there were a few AAs that had been selected by them that came down in 1977. I put a group together. While the senators had their orientation I—and Cannon helped me, and Danforth, and a couple others--staff—we put together an orientation for new AAs. And I remember having mature—what do you
do when you have X thousands of dollars for a budget and how do you do it, and how do you get this and that—but one of the things I remember is we did it for 2 nights-2 days, and one of the nights senators were doing some of their social things, and I decided to have a buffet at my house, with these new AAs. And who should appear at my house but Al Simpson and Anne, who to this day remember it because he had sent in his AA, who was a friend after the first session. You know you really ought to come over to these things Lee's got. This is more fun and more interesting than the stuff the senators are doing for you. So, to get back, I think maybe I had met Lamar briefly then. The other person I can never remember when I first met is Don Sundquist. But the other thing, you see, is, when I was Assistant to the President, I was Reagan's liaison with all the governors and mayors, so I dealt a great deal with Lamar then. So it may have been the sort of Baker-Tennessee carryover—he's OK. But I did not work much with him nor see much of him.

**DW:** Let me turn this off for just a moment.

**DW:** Yes. Well, we're not going to get through today.

**LV:** Let me tell you this. I will tell you there are some wonderful things as I recall these things. When I was Assistant Secretary of Transportation, because I am the guy with Drew Lewis that designed the Gas Tax.

**DW:** So you're responsible!

**LV:** And one of the most interesting things which Baker—I'd love to hear his side of it—I don't think it differs. When the Republicans in the Senate, in December of 1982, filibustered, the White House was of little or no help, and I was up in that back office with Baker and Cannon, and at one point Baker said to me, "You know, Lee, I'm the new Republican. I'm the majority leader. And if I fail to break this filibuster and get this legislation through, it is really going to be a dark day for Howard Baker. So it was just that I didn't want to support your gas tax, Howard Baker's future leadership was at stake on this issue." But we can talk about that some time.

**DW:** We'll get to that. What were the kinds of situations in which Senator Chafee and you and others in his office would be in direct involvement with Senator Baker and his leadership operation?
LV: I am trying to think of issues and I can't. But it was not unusual, and there evolved a kind of cabal, sort of moderate cabal, which I think is later important in terms of Howard Baker's presidential interests. But it wasn't unusual for Dick Lugar and Jack Danforth and John Chafee, and occasionally, Packwood or something like that—to sit in his office and talk about issues. And maybe it's in part because the AAs of those folks were meeting all the time and had become close friends, and they would talk all the time. It got to the point if I was looking for a staff person, even though I had thousands of resumes, I would call up some of these other AAs and say, "Dave, I'm looking for a person who has skills in this area." And we would sort of exchange, knowing that we had a lot of respect for the kind of people that they looked at and hired. And so it wasn't unusual that if there were a meeting—obviously the AAs would know that there was going to be a meeting—we would either be included or sort of prepare that meeting, or be the follow-up on that meeting. And so there really was a small nucleus. I can't remember—I can't recall—I have to go back and try to recall specific issues. But I would say that on most occasions, Baker and Chafee got along. I did a lot of stuff on the floor in those early days with Chafee, and just like on the leadership thing, I found—and I don't want to be misquoted on this—I found that Chafee wasn't quite as aggressive in soliciting support from his colleagues on amendments and issues of interest to him. So very often I would kind of work the floor with Bill Hildenbrand's assistance on amendments—I remember one of the first ones and I can't remember what it was, but it was on some environmental thing and we won the amendment—and Hildenbrand said, "You ought to take the tally sheet. You deserve this for your files." Because John was not, although I'm sure he's changed on that—he's not the kind of guy that would put his arm around you and say, "Dave, I really need this one."

DW: When Hildenbrand was working the floor, how did he do it? What was his motive?

LV: Well, he principally—on votes, he would sit at the tally desk or near it, and—part of his job—make sure that these guys were in there and voting on time. But he had a pretty good sense of people. And if he knew that something was coming up, he might call me—or if I was on the floor or in the Cloakroom—and say, "How is John going to vote on this thing?" And if I gave a sense that I knew, and for example, it might not have agreed with what they were thinking, I'm sure Bill, in terms of his responsibility of leadership, would communicate that. But yes, he really had a very good sense of how these people would vote. And what buttons to push if there were questions of uncertainty on particular votes and issues.
DW: Let me ask a question in a slightly different way, and you may just have to generalize about this. How could Baker help Chafee and how could Chafee help Baker, during those years? What could Baker do for Chafee, that would be important to Chafee? And what did Chafee do for Baker that would be important to Baker?

LV: I don't know. I don't even know that either of them ever thought of that question.

DW: Well that may be a political science question.

LV: Yes. Well, it's a good question. If you get an answer, it's very informative. But I don't think that—let me put it this way. Chafee is not a politician—in the traditional sense. Howard Baker is a politician, but I think in a different sense. I mean, he is different as a politician than Bob Dole.

DW: How is he different?

LV: Well, I think Bob Dole is more looking for commitments, keeping a score card on—you know, Hillary didn't support me last time but I need her to support me now, and if she doesn't, I'm going to remember this—or somebody is. Whether Jim Cannon or Hildenbrand kept that in their heads, I don't know. But I always thought that Howard Baker had an assurance of knowing where his Republican flock were on issues. And whether they were the right or the left or whatever, he kind of knew his members—he kind of knew his flock. And I never got the impression that there were tradeoffs. I'm sure there were. He and I talked a lot about that in December of 1982 on the Gas Tax. But it was a different style. Maybe it's in contrast, for example, even to Bobby Byrd—who everyone sort of knew kept secret sheets of whether you voted with him or against him or whatever. I never saw that side of Howard Baker. And even knowing all the staff as well as I did, I never really had a sense that there was anyone sort of keeping score. So, to answer your question, I don't either one of them felt that they could benefit the other.

DW: They didn't see their relationship as one of exchange, or that sort of thing.

LV: No.

DW: You earlier mentioned that Senator Baker and Senator Chafee both served on the Public
Works Committee, and that Senator Chafee started out on Labor and then was there two years or so and then went to Finance.

LV: That was a big issue for Chafee.

DW: How so?

LV: Well, when we first came down here, the Senate, as you know, was reorganizing committees. And Chafee was temporarily put on the Judiciary Committee. Chafee is a lawyer. But we did—again, I'm putting the staff together and have no one, so I say "we"—we did the Griffin-Bell confirmation, which was interesting. Mack Mathias was on that committee, as Banking. And I'm not a lawyer, and trying to go through what this guy's opinion was on certain things, I don't know, but for me, I didn't think that was the committee for Chafee. And Chafee, while he is a lawyer, has never really been a practicing lawyer in the sense of legal scholar. So when the choices came, even though he had some considerable seniority because he had been a senator, had been a governor, had been a cabinet secretary, he really was interested in some of the social issues, like Labor Resources Committee, but on the other hand, Pell was on that, and Pell was more senior. I mean Pell grants were already a thing of the past. But in the next cycle, in 1978, I got into a debate with John about whether he shouldn't get off the Labor Committee, and I proposed to him to go on either the Armed Services Committee or the Finance Committee—as Navy Secretary. But he obviously knew this stuff. And he was on the Intelligence Committee, which by the way Howard Baker was on in 1977, which is another source of—which is how I got to know Levingood. Chafee was on the Intelligence Committee, and there was a big debate as to committee—each senator had a committee staff person—for example Levingood was Howard's. Chafee, as Navy Secretary--former secretary—had this kind of affinity for putting new people on, even though he had me interviewing a lot of people for that Committee slot, he concluded and said to the then staff director he didn't want to hire somebody he didn't know well. And he insisted that I be his designee. This caused a lot of flurry because they wanted a full-time person down there. I know Howard Baker supported him; I know Dick Lugar supported him; I know Malcolm Wallop supported him—guys that were also freshmen on the Committee. So I did a little bit of both, which is how I got to know Levingood. But, as a result, Chafee had—and he was very conscientious about the Intelligence Committee—so I thought, gee, maybe Armed Services is something that fits. Then the more I began to think politically, I said, gee, Finance Committee, taxes, etc. etc.
So he and I went through this as to which one should you be on, and he really grappled with this. Having made the Finance Committee decision, it meant that the next guy up who was below Chafee in requesting Armed Services, would get it, because Chafee would go to Finance. That was John Warner. John Warner was Chafee's deputy when he was navy Secretary. When Chafee decided to run in 1972 against Pell, Warner became Secretary of the Navy. They are very, very close friends. So Chafee's going on Finance helped Warner, but also, as they got into a lot of—in the late 1970s—Finance Committee issues, I think Chafee really was an asset to Howard Baker in the leadership because, though he was a freshman, he really was more moderate in there and was trying to learn a lot of the issues that I think were important, not just to Bob Dole and Bob Packwood, but it was the committee was important to the leadership.

DW: Let me ask you a general question about committee assignments. The Republicans, ostensibly at that time, strictly adhered to the seniority principle.

LV: Right.

DW: And I am told that Hildenbrand was the one that was responsible for keeping the hierarchy [up top date], as it were. What I don't understand is how much slack is there in there for the introduction of political considerations when it comes time for a reshuffling membership at the start of a new session. Do you have any impression on that?

LV: Well, you're correct. Bill Hildenbrand was the keeper. Because I dealt a lot with "which way is Chafee going to go? Which one does he want?" And one of the things about John is he tends not to make decisions until he really has to. And I would say that there is very little political. I think there are others that would like to have more political input to that. At least at that time. But it was really more seniority, and then there was sort of the objectivity, supposedly, of how does that person fit and play on that committee? But I don't think that you could very well say, "We don't want a moderate," or "We don't want a conservative," in that particular committee slot. If the seniority came along that whatever you were, that's what the committee got, I think. I don't think there was much play on that. I think there was talk about it, but I don't think when it came down to it that people would dare to kind of play with the history of the process.

DW: After Senator Chafee went on the Finance Committee, you were AA by this time—
LV: Right.

DW: Did you have occasion to pay a whole lot of attention to that committee, or did you have other staff people doing it?

LV: Not as much. I really began to pull together a pretty good staff of people, most of who had stayed with him for quite a while, and I had one guy that I hired from Bob Packwood's staff as [Chief] of the Finance Committee, and then I hired a young guy from Rhode Island, who later did trade stuff for Chafee, and subsequently I recommended to Bill Brock when he was at USTR. So I didn't. And you know, the Finance Committee is kind of unique. Let me put it this way. I probably dealt more with the Finance Committee when I was Assistant Secretary of Transportation than I did when I was AA.

DW: Well, let me ask you a couple of questions regardless. One is a general question, and applies not just to the Finance Committee. One of the things I'm interested in is the extent to which Senator Baker, if any, as minority leader, had any major effect on what Republicans were doing in the various committees, at the committee stage of consideration. And if there was some effect, how did it come about?

LV: I don't know—it's just conjecture.

DW: Sure.

LV: I don't know firsthand. Whatever day it was—their luncheon group meetings—

DW: Tuesday.

LV: Tuesday lunches. And then there were a couple of other groups—I'm trying to remember which ones they were—but there was a moderate group of Republicans—

DW: That was the Wednesday group.

LV: The Wednesday group, who used to meet—and it was always interesting when we would host these—again, these other same AAs, we were always a part of that—
DW: And you had the Steering Committee.

LV: And you had the Steering Committee. But, to answer your question, I didn't get the feeling that the leadership really was driving policy. I always felt more that, whether it was Dole or Packwood, were working more closely with their fellows than they were some direct correlation between that and the leadership. And the same thing on the Environment Committee, and certainly on the Intelligence Committee.

DW: What do you recall about Senator Roth's efforts in the late 1970s in the promotion of Roth-Kemp, and how did his colleagues, particularly those on the Finance Committee, react to all of that?

LV: Interesting because his office was next to ours at Dirksen. And that's where I first got to know—

DW: Dennis Thomas?

LV: Well, I knew Dennis, yes. But I was trying to think of his Press Secretary.

DW: Brady. Jim Brady.

LV: Jim Brady. Who I worked a lot more with Brady. But, while Dennis wasn't a part of sort of our group on Finance issues that they began to work more closely with, I vividly remember because I remember the photograph, which was a Jim Brady special, of four (I think) senators talking about the promotion of this Roth-Kemp, or at least the Roth bill, initially, sitting in the Finance Committee with green sun visors and pencils with erasers on both ends. I remember saying to Chafee, "I'm just politically not sure this picture is worth much back home. What does it conjure up to an average Rhode Islander?"

DW: Was Chafee one of those?

LV: Yes, he was. Yes, he was. It looked like Carswell or something. But I think as you got to that point, the other piece of that that's interesting for Chafee is enterprise zones.

DW: Yes.
Because Kemp had introduced that bill in the House, and I went to John and said, "I think this is a very interesting bill that you ought to consider trying to seek to be the original Senate sponsor for. You're from an urban area." He had then been on the Banking Committee; he was on the Finance Committee; and I said, "I think this is something you should think about." Well in typical John Chafee fashion, he said, "Well, you go talk to Jack." And I did, and Chafee became the original sponsor, and I say that to you because the Finance Committee later played a significant role in moving that out of the Senate. When I went to the White House, I became, as Jack Kemp says, the godfather of enterprise zones because Reagan had picked it up, and when I subsequently went to be Undersecretary of HUD, one of the reasons the President sent me there was to try to carry this enterprise zone thing. But it was one of those issues, again, like Roth-Kemp, that where is the senator going to play, and because I had been involved with Kemp on this, on the Roth-Kemp issue, I said, "You know, maybe this guy doesn't have such a bad idea." And on fiscal policies, Chafee is clearly more conservative than he is, for example, on environmental policy issues.

So he was comfortable with the basic premise of Roth-Kemp from the start. But others among the brethren were not.

LV: Right.

Do you have any sense as to where Senator Baker stood in that, as that issue was developing?

I kind of more remember the PR, the hoopla of that on the floor, on the steps of the Capitol. And I remember that the fly-in or fly-out that all these senators fanned out around the country to give speeches on it, but I don't remember as much on the Baker role in it.

You used a term a moment ago in regard to the green eyeshades and the pencils—the Brady production—was that—

Yes.

That is obviously a term of art, is it not? Could you explain that a little bit?
LV: Yes. Well, I'll tell you. Having met with Mike Deaver, who I have absolute utmost respect for, and I love the guy dearly—I think he was unfairly treated in this town—Mike is an absolute genius at what he does, and I wish he had gone after government to be a public relations person instead of a consultant. That's another story. Jim Brady is not a PR—production kind of guy. Except that he really understood what attracted the press. And this is a great example of "How are we going to get national press to come here for senators to talk about this bill—at the early stages. Well, it's a gimmick. And that's Brady. I admire him for that.

DW: He was very inventive in that type of thing.

LV: Yes. Inventive in a way that—as I did—you will say, "Is this going to fly politically?" And I think Jim's view was, "It's going to do what I need it to do." It's going to get the press there.

DW: I've been told that Ron McMahan was helpful to Brady and others involved in the promotion of Roth-Kemp. Could you talk a little bit about the role Ron played in Senator Baker's operation and in relation to Senate Republicans in general.

LV: Yes, I knew Ron well—spent a lot of time with him—socialized with him a lot. I don't drink bourbon, and I don't drink Jack Daniels. But he does—or did. And I'd seen a good bit of him—not recently, but when he was back down in Knoxville. He was a rather extraordinary guy in terms of his ability with the press, because he really understood Howard Baker. And as a good press person can, he can use the terminology and the phraseology that the Senator would use. Not necessarily if you caught Howard Baker with a microphone, but he really would know on a given issue how Baker would think on a particular thing. And I think he was particularly helpful in the leadership, because when the leadership was trying to convey messages on various things, he understood this fellow without going and saying, "Senator, we've got to work on this press release." I mean, the press release came after. We'll write the release after we do it, because we know what we think about this. And I think, again, I remember more of Ron upstairs when I was at Transportation on transportation issues. And we were close. His, I don't remember whether she was his wife or his girlfriend at the time, and ______ wife—the four of us were good friends—but he had an ability to know the Senator, and therefore, with other senators in the leadership office, and with Cannon or whatever, I think he really knew what the Senator
could say and how he said it. Now I think, on the other hand, that Cannon and McMahan sometimes didn't always agree. I think that's fairly clear out there. And yet there were different dimensions. I mean, Jim understood the policy in the broader—Cannon may have understood sort of the scope of what he was doing and thought he was representing the Senator because he knew him. On the other hand, Cannon brought a bigger umbrella to it. But, as I'm sure you know, they clashed sometimes. And at the time, when Tommy Griscom was a kid, who learned very well from Ron McMahan.

DW: Was it common, again, and I'm asking for your sense of it—was it common for people in Senate offices where there was a feeling that they had a PR problem of some sort or other, to go to Ron and did he serve as a private consultant, or source of advice and assistance?

LV: I don't think that many of the press secretaries did that. I'm quite sure that mine and Chafee's office didn't. But I did. And maybe that's kind of my relationship with the Baker team, that sometimes I would go and say, "We're going to do this or that," because I had a lot of respect for him. And I might say to my press guy, "You ought to call Ron," or, "Why don't we follow up on this." So I did that, but I think if you talk to Art, my former press guy, I bet he didn't talk to McMahan a half-dozen times. If he did, he probably talked to him because I said I really think you ought to talk to him.

DW: Do you recall any situations in which Senator Chafee was involved in a legislative conflict of some sort or other, where there were negotiations involved that drew Senator Baker's attention and involvement?

LV: I can't. Wish I could for you. I've tried in the last couple weeks to think of snail darter and other related issues. But one of the issues later on that is important that we can talk about is the Panama Canal Treaty.

DW: Right.

LV: Because there was a trip made, and I don't have the dates. There was a trip made following a trip by Bobby Byrd to Panama, which was Howard Baker, Jim Cannon—I don't remember whether Lee Wingood went—Cannon I know did, Senator Chafee, myself, Senator Garn—Jake Garn—and his AA, and a couple of others—
DW: I think—wasn't McMahan along on that trip?

LV: Yes. Yes. And there are some interesting stories about that trip, because, as you may know, we arrived in Panama and Baker was a little miffed that we really weren't greeted by much except some low-level foreign ministry guy—but the schedule was to fly over to west coast of Panama to the summer residence of General Torrejos, and we helicoptered over, and it was clear that Baker was—not that Baker was very agitated—so it appeared demonstrated—but I think he was a little miffed, and I think he was miffed in part because there had been a lot to do with Byrd's arrival there, and I guess it was a news story, and so—

DW: Could I ask you a backround question before we get into this? What are the origins of this trip? Who initiated it, and why was Senator Chafee along?

LV: I'm not sure I know that. In fact, when you sit there and say, "Baker, Chafee, and Garn—why that team?" I don't know. I don't know. If you haven't gotten it yet, I'll bet Jim Cannon can tell you. I don't know. I don't know whether it's intelligence related—again, that one of the things that—Chafee and Baker did a lot of things together on intelligence, and I think Chafee— Chafee is pretty much of a hawk on intelligence matters, in the sense that he's very concerned about this kind of thing. When he was Secretary of the Navy, you may recall, the Glomar Project took place. And one of the reasons that Chafee insisted on putting me on the staff for a while was that he said to the intelligence staff director, "I know Lee Verstandig. I've known him for 20 years. I trust his judgment. Now he may not know intelligence, but he is intelligent enough to help me in this particular capacity." And one of the questions Chafee said is, without getting into the Glomar, is that he was very concerned about intelligence and one of the things was, you had to have people you could trust. I spent almost two years trying to find people for him for that job. And I hired an intern one summer who had done some intelligence work and later came on the staff, and I hired another guy who helped us at a distance on the committee in the hope of bringing the two of them together. That second person later went to the NSC, and the first person later became the staff director of the Intelligence Committee when the Republicans were in the majority. But it took two years to get that. But I think the answer may be found somewhere in the intelligence side of Chafee. But what I was going to say is we landed in Torrejos' residence, and we went into his home—the living room there. We were sitting around and waiting for this meeting to start with the general, and I made a comment to a man sitting next to me—we were sitting on the floor—
DW: A Panamanian?

LV: Yes. And I didn't know him. And I said it seemed to me that it was really unfortunate that the Panamanians had not at least as properly received Senator Baker and his delegation as they had a week or ten days before. And I said, "Just knowing Senator Baker, I think that will start things off on a bad foot, here." Well, the next thing you know, there is some conversation in Spanish, and Torrejos stands up and says—whatever this guy's name is, who turned out to be Gabriel Lewis, who was later to be the chief negotiator for the Panama Canal, but was just a private citizen and friend of Torrejos—"Lee has a very good idea." And they stopped, and Torrejos literally apologizes to Baker and says, "I assure you that we will have the proper people see you off when you leave. I want to get this meeting off to its proper start." And then they broke up for a few minutes and had something soft to drink, and Torrejos took me up these little steps to this wing of the house where there was enormous—it was a bedroom, with the biggest bed I have ever seen, and several women sitting around this bed—and he opened up the top drawer of his dresser and he pulled out these cigars. Cuban cigars, about this big, that had a seal on them of General Torrejos. He said, "Here, now, give him these. It was a wonderful idea. I want to start right with the Senator." And I said, "General, I cannot accept these. These are illegal. I cannot bring them back in the United States." "No, you must." I said, "I can't." Well, flash forward—for months after I would have someone from the Panamanian Embassy come to my office in the Dirksen Building with a box of cigars. And it all started off because— And Cannon, I remember one morning at the hotel there, had breakfast, was talking about the jist of these visits, and we went around, and I'm sure there is in fact a document generated about of all the things we did—anyway, one day Chafee went off to kind of view the estuaries of the Panama Canal from an environmental perspective. And so Baker, Garn, Cannon, I, and a couple of us—Leavingood, I think—went to the headquarters of the Guardo Nacional, to be briefed on sort of intelligence-related matters, and we had a briefing by a colonel—a Colonel Noriega, who told us the capabilities of the Panamanian Guardo Nacional to disrupt the Canal, which is rather a threat. Well, there is a picture, and if you don't have it, I have it somewhere. There is a picture of Jake Garn sitting with his fist under his chin, and Howard Baker—the body language is beautiful—Howard Baker with his arms folded, and Cannon and I behind him, and at the end of this thing, some other colonel or other gave each of us a wooden machete. It was carved and had all kinds of things. And I vividly remember walking down the hall of the Guardo Nacional after this thing, with Jake Garn, swinging this back and forth, saying, "I'll cut these guys—who do these tin-horn dictators think they
are?" And I'm thinking, oh, my gosh, we're trying to understand whether to pass this treaty, and I'm sure Garn didn't vote for it then. But I think it had an impact at that time, because I remember talking to Cannon about it, and he said, "Are these guys dumb? Do they want the leader's help or don't they?" But I don't know the origins of that. I spent a considerable amount of time working the Canal Treaty for Chafee, with the Administration. And one thing that I should say that you will pick up elsewhere, and Bob Shull certainly knows this, we worked very closely with the Carter Administration, in the Senate. Chafee has a view that if the President or chief of state nominates someone, unless you find that they are a felon or something, you support him. So Chafee was very supportive of Carter nominees, and on the Canal Treaty, because Chafee really was interested from a military point of view—an intelligence point of view, we really were sort of on the inside of a lot of that stuff. Ambler Moss, who was the Ambassador then, we worked very closely with, and we worked closely with the leadership's office because we really were interested, and thought there were some ways to make this work.

DW: You think Senator Baker had made up his mind on the Treaty before he went down there?

LV: I don't think so. I don't think so.

DW: What do you think he was trying to find out on the trip?

LV: Well, I wish I could remember. You know, the kind of probing questions Howard Baker gives—I think there was a concern about the nature of—and probably rightly so—the nature of the Torrejos government. I mean, knowing Howard and knowing Levingood, you've got all the intelligence you could possible get. And we did meet, by the way, with a number of different factions, I remember vividly—sort of the intellectual community, the newspapers and the business. And I think there was a sense of "Let's try to find out what's under this." And I think that was of concern. Looking back at Baker and other foreign heads of states that I have just been more peripherally involved in, he always looks for that kind of thing. Whether it was the Shah of Iran or whatever, trying to get a sense of, "OK, here's the person. I think I understand him or her. What's below that? What's out there?" And I think that part of that was trying to get a sense—I think also trying to get a sense of the management of that Canal itself and going out there into the locks and talking to all the technical people and engineers. You know, is this something that only we can do? How do we educate these people? Can they do it? What are the military components in the
various—we visited most of the darn facilities in the whole—not only U.S., but Canal area. I think, knowing Baker, he was trying to get kind of a comprehensive picture of not only the ground but what was there. Because I think as you go in and follow debates, I mean, he clearly understood not just the Treaty, he understood Panama, he understood our American presence, he understood what our roles were, what the liabilities were. And I think it was kind of a fact-finding.

DW: Describe for me his file in meetings with the Panamanians. How would he conduct himself?

LV: Well, thinking back, it's real sweet he got off to a bad start. And I think in that large setting, I'm sure Howard had other private sessions with him, or smaller sessions. It was very formal. I mean it was kind of—I'm here, we're here to learn. We want to hear what you have to say. We want—of course being interrupted all the time—whatever you want, we'll get. You know, the General gave us helicopters to go visit Colon and a couple of other cities. Of course, they were sort of, as you would do in any kind of thing like this, they were sort of trying to program where they wanted us to go. I remember there are some pictures in some newspapers, and I have pictures of us walking down the street of Colon with the General. People on the sides were waving and cheering—sort of like a political rally. And Baker understood that, but 'let's go and do a couple of other things. Can we pop in here and talk to these people?' Trying to get a sense, trying to get a pulse for himself. And so we did the script as asked for by the General, but I remember the act, because I was involved in a meeting with some of the academic people, and journalists, and stuff like that. Trying to kind of probe underneath, you know. What's the government like? What's this guy like? And I don't think that we found, in contrast to someone like Noriega—I don't think that any of us came away with a sense that this guy was really as bad as other dictators may have been. He's a dictator, but I think that there was a sense that this guy knew what he was doing and he had control of the government.

DW: Do you think that one thing that Senator Baker would have been interested in finding out or making a judgment on was whether this is someone that really could be dealt with?

LV: Yes, I think so. I think that came along. I think that your first impression of this guy is different. I think it came along and I think that—particularly a guy like, and I can't remember who the earlier negotiators were—but a guy like Gabriel Lewis, who I think
Howard Baker really had a lot of respect for. He was – I