
Interview with Malcolm Wallop

The interview was conducted by David Welborn in Arlington, Virginia on November 14, 1995

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INTERVIEW: Malcolm Wallop

PLACE: Arlington, VA

DATE: November 14, 1995

DW: Senator, we were getting awfully cold and wet wandering the streets of Arlington before we were able to take advantage of your hospitality this afternoon, and we appreciate it. Let me begin by asking you to talk about your first associations with and impressions of Howard Baker.

MW: It really started when I came to the Senate in 1976 or 1977. I had met him but couldn’t claim to know him, and he wouldn’t have claimed to have known me, as it often is with candidates and other folks. So my first associations were when I got here, and the first associations were that he was running for minority leader.

DW: Had anyone spoken to you in regard to his prospective candidacy for minority leader between the time you were elected to the Senate in November and when you arrived in Washington, do you recall?

MW: He did. Bob Griffin was his opponent at the time; they both had. I don’t recall anybody from the outside having _____, although I’m sure they did, because they do now, and I don’t know why it would be different.

DW: So he called you on the telephone?

MW: Yes, and I visited him in his office. He made his pitch and, in fact, I ended out voting for Bob Griffin. I frankly couldn’t tell you why, both of them were strangers to me.

DW: This is a long time ago, I realize, but do you have any recollection at all as to the kind of pitch he made?

MW: They both made the same pitch, and I suspect it’s not all that different now. Neither of them promised me seats on favored committees or anything like that; they just both said they though they could coalesce what was then a very small minority, we were fewer than forty. The idea was how we were going to be even remotely effective. Each of them were thinking they could attract those conservatives in the Democratic party.

DW: What do you recall about the way he went about, to the extent he did it, of integrating the eight new Republican Senators into the life of the Senate and the Republican Party in the Senate?

MW: Howard was a very cordial man and certainly in my time the most effective Republican leader. He, unlike his successor, was very interested in what other Republicans thought,
were thinking, had to say, felt. Of course, his leadership was a little more supportive too than Dole has been. John Tower was an aggressive supporter of Howard Baker, and Jake Garn—those were the early ones.

DW: How did he manifest his interest, how did he lead you to come to feel he was really interested in what you were thinking?

MW: For starters, we used to have a lot more of what were called conferences where everybody, all Republican Senators, gathered over an issue. We had education once, we had the fifteen Arab plane sale, we had a variety of issues and conferences, which Republicans don’t do now. One of the things that Howard was able to do that was terribly effective was that he could tell early where there were going to be divisions amongst us and having learned that through these conferences was able to work on them long before they became issues on the floor. Senator Dole’s habit has been to wait until they are issues on the floor; often then it’s too late to heal or even accommodate major differences.

DW: When he would see issues coming down the road and after he had developed a sense of what the potential problems were, what would he do?

MW: One of the things he always did was he had a weekly leadership meeting before the weekly Republican policy luncheon. He was very available to people. If he thought there was a division rising among Republicans he would find out what it was and see where there was room for slack. He also used those conferences; in those the differences frequently got solved at the conference or he would appoint little task forces, get them to report back at a subsequent conference. We weren’t always unified as a party, but we were startlingly more unified with the 37 or 38 of us than they have been since that time. Mind you, there were some quite different Republicans in there between the Jake Javits and an Ed Brookes, and a Malcolm Wallop and a Cliff Hansen, for example. He had always a handful of views to find a way to meld.

DW: As leader, both in the minority and the majority, how did he conduct his business on the floor? I don’t mean in the official role, but in moving around the floor and in the cloak room. Was he highly visible? Was he out there, or was he doing business in his office? How did he operate?

MW: All of the above really, it sort of depended on what was going on. He had good people working for him upon whom he depended quite a lot—Bill Hildenbrand and others who were his eyes and ears in the cloak room. The Senate was a much more cordial place in those days than it is now. Not only did he have a pretty good idea what was going on among Republicans, but a fair idea of what was going on among Democrats.

DW: What were the consequences within the Republican Party in the Senate and for Baker’s leadership, if any, of the position he took on the Panama Canal treaties?
MW: There was a tremendous, passionate division of views on that. The interesting thing to me is that Howard Baker got far fewer harsh reactions to his position than did, say, Jack Danforth who continued to suffer from having voted for the Panama Canal the entire time he was a Senator in Missouri. Among Republicans, there was a sense that Howard had done it fairly and a disappointment that he had sided with them.

DW: What was it that allowed people to conclude that he had done it fairly?

MW: He was never one to shut somebody out or off, and he was never one to disrespect an opposing view, even though he quite passionately held one side or another. Howard Baker was above all a courtly human being, and that goes a long way towards soothing ruffles. And the ruffles were real.

DW: But it didn’t impair his effectiveness as leader?

MW: No, I would have to say that for a couple of months it did. Impair is a good word, because it certainly didn’t cripple him in any way. Keep in mind there was still sufficiently few of us that we had to come back together or be totally useless altogether.

DW: He supported President Carter on a number of other sensitive foreign policy issues, some sales of aircraft in the Middle East.

MW: In fact, it was mostly Republicans that got the Arab F-15 sale through. But that was a kind of thing that Republicans could relatively comfortably do, much like Clinton having gotten NAFTA through with Republican votes.

DW: He, of course, broke with President Carter on the SALT II treaty. Would you tell me what you recall about that trip you took with him to Moscow?

MW: It was a great trip. Incidentally, _____ a predicate in there, it wasn’t only Howard Baker breaking with Carter on that. There was a number of them, Pat Moynihan was one who said that it was badly negotiated and fatally flawed. It wasn’t Howard’s desire to break with his President on something, but that was really a piece of work, that treaty. We left, as you know, with an all-Republican journey to the Soviet Union.

DW: By the way, whose idea was this trip, do you know?

MW: I think it was his, my recollection is that it was his. I had been a very vocal opponent of the treaty from my vantage point on the Intelligence Committee and had written and articulated against it. I was among the first to be asked on that, but I don’t think it was John Tower. I’m pretty sure it was his idea. We went first to what was then Leningrad. We arrived there and had a sort of very Soviet, fake greeting telling us all how important our views were to them.
Then it got quite hostile, because it was obvious we weren’t getting answers to the questions that we asked. One of the other interesting things was that Howard was very inclined to make certain that each of us in these meetings had a chance to comment or ask a question, which is not always the way with a CODEL. Usually the top dog likes to keep the others down. Several amusing things happened. Senator Garn and his wife Kathleen were along. She was pregnant, so pregnant that we were wondering how wise it had been to go on a trip; she gave birth only a couple of weeks after we got back. They were Mormon; they knew that the rooms were bugged, so they would refuse to kiss each other good night, lest they be overheard, but were quite willing to go to sleep cursing the Soviet Union and talking about what dogs they were to their people. I remember when we met with Brezhnev who was quite doped; he was in a lot of pain, we were told arthritis and other things at the time. He came to meet with us and sat at a desk where he suddenly starting groping with this red telephone beside him, making not very much sense through all of this. Then when it was all over and we were having the television cameras at a receiving line—I always wear a little pocket handkerchief, I always have, and I had a brand new, very bright red one that my wife had given me for Christmas. Brezhnev came along and pointed at it, and I took it out to show it to him—he said, “Thank you” and put it in his pocket and kept it. We’ve got that on television. The most interesting part of it to me was when Ambassador Tune gave a big reception for the delegation. It was a stunning contrast for somebody new to international politics, the Soviet Union, and everything else. The night we were there was [gloomy] and dark, snowy, out in the streets little Soviets were hustling by. The streets were pushed aside while we went down the Troika lane, kicking snow, and then we got to this place. It was warm and bright and full of champagne and caviar and smoked sturgeon and violinists, and the most powerful people in the Soviet Union were there—the head of all their publishing, the head of agriculture; the head of the armed services; Arbatoff, the head of the US-Canada Institute; our ambassador; the whole diplomatic corps; all the attaches; the leading military people; a huge party. Gromeko was there. You couldn’t help but notice the contrast between what was inside and what was outside. I had asked for permission to go to see Sakarov, because I was friends with his children in Brockton, Massachusetts. Ambassador Tune got Senator Baker to try to talk me out of it. Incidentally, Sam Hiakawa was along, and his sister-in-law was Stalin’s daughter. His wife’s brother had married Svetlana Stalin.

DW: The architect, James Lloyd Wright, _____, was Hiakawa’s brother-in-law.

MW: Yes, and that was another intriguing part of the journey. At any rate, Ambassador Tune came and tried to talk me out of it; Gromeko did, Arbatoff did. Sam was going to go down with me, and Gromeko told me I couldn’t go there. I said, “Why not?” He said, “The Soviet people are very angry with Sakarov, and we don’t think we can protect you.” I said, “For heaven’s sake! I know I’m the most junior member of this crowd, but even I would be missed by Howard Baker if I wasn’t there when we got on the airplane tomorrow!” This was our last night. So in the end they let us go, and we were driven all around Moscow. It wasn’t really very far away, the length of time it took us to get back from there versus the length of time it took us to get there was a noticeable contrast.
DW: The purpose was to distort the vision.

MW: We had an incredible meeting with Sakarov, a tiny little apartment, but he was still a hero of Soviet science, an academician, and was therefore… still had a pretty good place. We were there quite a long time and talked about all kinds of things, feeling certain we were bugged, but nonetheless he was quite open.

DW: Were you impressed with him? I know that’s a silly question.

MW: Oh, very! I remember his startling blue eyes. His wife had made a little cold pork loin for us. We were sitting there having had this great feast. Sam Hiakawa fell asleep; he sat on the bed and Sam sat on the bed, and I sat on the only chair. Elaina Bonner was standing and passing us cookies and cold pork and other kinds of things. We talked about nuclear power, and we talked about SDI—it wasn’t called that then, but I was already very interested and had been writing articles about it. So that went on, and because we were so long getting back, Howard began to worry quite a lot. When they had gotten back to the Soviet hotel, there was a bunch of refusniks out demonstrating outside, and there was a nasty scene with the KGB hauling those people off into the night, and threatening Howard with not being able to leave. They had a bad time in our absence, and they were certain that maybe Gromeko had been right, they hadn’t been able to provide for my safety. At any rate, it was an incredible trip.

DW: I recall Ron McMahan, I think it was Ron, talking about a scene when you were meeting with Brezhnev in which Brezhnev had been playing with a paper clip and reshaped it into something in the form of a little airplane. He got up and was wandering around the room, someone was reading his statement.

MW: Yes, he was very detached. It was when he leaned over to the red phone that we all sort of...

DW: You have touched on some aspects of this, but was there anything distinctive, based on this experience, about Howard Baker as a leader of a CODEL?

MW: One is that he worked very hard as a leader of them; two, that he tried very hard to include all of us and allow us our questions and our say. It was well organized; he was a tough U.S. presence with foreign people. We stopped in Brussels at NATO the night before we went to the Soviet Union. He was always an admirable presence. I’ve been on some CODELs where the leader of the CODEL wasn’t really very bright, and that makes a big difference.

DW: I’m curious about this, how does a person’s performance as leader of a CODEL affect their standing in the Senate once the CODEL is over?
MW: Not much. Except for those who were on it; the leader of the Senate is sort of the totality of his efforts to earn and maintain respect. That no more than anything else. It’s always nice to have somebody come back saying that it was a good trip and that we learned a lot and that he handled it well, but it doesn’t so much add to it as it would have detracted from it had everybody said, “Howard didn’t even know where the North Sea was” or something, that would be damaging. It would be more likely to damage you than add to you.

DW: What was the purpose of that trip?

MW: SALT II.

DW: I know, but what is to—

MW: The purpose was to shore up our rationale for opposing it. We did that by the questions that we asked and the answers we received. It was pretty clear that the Soviets viewed SALT II as a strategic advance for themselves, and Carter veiwed SALT II as a political advance for himself. That’s where I began to get seriously opposed to arms control, anyway, after that trip.

DW: It was not, through the exchanges, to indicate to the Soviets some adjustments that might be made ______?

MW: No, because it had been negotiated. It was really to indicate to them what we found unsatisfactory about it and for them not to be surprised if there wasn’t’ a.

DW: How did you, as a brand new freshman Senator, come to be appointed to the Intelligence Committee?

MW: Howard appointed me; it had just been formed. It hadn’t existed, you know...the Church Committee. In those days, it wasn’t viewed as a particular honor but a particular penance. That was before people started coming downstairs and giving press conferences about national secrets, gaining them all kinds of notoriety. But in those days, if the intelligence community was doing its job, nobody ever heard of you. And if it wasn’t doing its job, it was your fault. It was an awful period for the intelligence community, because the Church Commission had destroyed the morale. I remember we went down to the White House one time at a Carter invitation, telling us about how he wanted an intelligence charter. He said to the assembled group that, “There never has been a president so moral as I.” Howard looked at me and he went “Uuuhhh!” He left! He left the rest of us there. Admiral Turner put together a charter that was one hundred thirty-something pages long, and it was a hundred thirty-something pages of prohibited acts and no mission, no affirmative mission. That was what we were doing. I said to Turner, “This is not going to fly anywhere. Nobody ever had trouble getting a bureaucrat to do nothing. What are they supposed to do?” And they dropped it.
DW:  Had you expressed an interest in being on the committee?

MW:  Yes, because I was trying to get as much a breadth of the national experience as I could. I was the first non-lawyer in the history of the Senate to sit on the Judiciary Committee.

DW:  I didn’t realize that.

MW:  Howard stuck up for me in that position, not that he needed to. I got it, not because I chose it, but because I was Senator 100, and that was the only seat left. Bill Scott from Virginia was saying, “Goddam, you can’t have non-lawyers on the Judiciary Committee!” This carried on for a long time, the end of the Committee on Committees, and I was sitting between Bill Scott and Howard Baker. Baker let me carry on for awhile, then he said, “Well, Bill, there’s just nothing we can do about it. Nobody wanted that position. Oh, by the way, would you like to know who the Senator is who got it?” Scott said, “Of course I would.” Howard said, “He’s sitting right beside you.” Scott said, “Well, now, Senator, I didn’t mean to take anything from you!” That was typical of the way Howard handled things. He allowed him to rant on and say his say and then sort of diffused it by introducing me.

DW:  In 1979 your committee assignments were reshuffled. You went off Public Works and Judiciary and onto Energy and Finance and then also went on the Ethics Committee. What was going on there?

MW:  Those were committees that I wanted; Simpson had come, he was a lawyer and wanted on the Judiciary Committee. Cliff Hansen had been on the Finance Committee, and any westerner wanted to be on the Energy and Natural Resource.

DW:  What about the Ethics Committee assignment, how did that come about?

MW:  Howard asked me if I would; he had asked everybody else in the world, and they all said no. He promised me that it wouldn’t last more than two years. It did. Nothing was going on; at any rate, that was before Abscam. There was nothing much pending, the usual run-of-the-mill little things. He wanted me on there because he said he respected a sense of judgment and integrity.

DW:  We’ll come back a little bit later to your experience as Chairman of the Ethics Committee. Let me ask you about a series of legislative situations during the Carter years and see what recollections you have, if any, about the role Senator Baker played in the Republican response. First of all, Carter’s energy program, there was a lot to that, and it’s probably too broad a question.

MW:  Howard had his hands full on that. He gave us a lot of rein on the energy program. My former colleague, Cliff Hansen, felt bitterly betrayed by the Dominici and McClure, who
were junior to Cliff, in the negotiations on that natural gas thing. They came in, and Howard bought off on the compromise that those two had negotiated. Cliff was quite bitter about it, as I recall. That energy stuff lasted four years, it wasn’t that one, that was the first of them. He was very generous to me after I had gone on to the Energy Committee and on the Finance Committee, giving me quite a lot of rein to negotiate.

DW: To negotiate with whom? The administration?

MW: With the Democrats. The administration was more willing to negotiate with Republicans than this one is or has been, but they were still pretty exclusive. I have a hard time remembering his position on each of those things as they went along. I know he encouraged me to put the first tax set in history on that windfall profits tax and very much supported me and was startled when we got it done! But he was very supportive on that. I can’t remember where he came down on those issues of deregulation, as Carter called it, which was in fact more regulation than the establishment of the Energy Department.

DW: My recollection is that he was with the good guys on those issues.

MW: Yes, I think I would have remembered had he not been.

DW: To make sure I understand what you’re saying, in these matters in the energy area in which you were involved or participated, he pretty much left it to his Republican colleagues.

MW: Yes, it was typical of his style of leadership that unless there was a very specific reason to divert somebody from what they were doing, he tried his best to make certain that they succeeded. He trusted his committee chairmen and wanted from them only to know what they were doing and to be willing to fit it into the rest of what was the Republican program.

DW: Did you participate in the filibuster against the labor law reform proposals?

MW: Yes.

DW: What role did he play in that, do you recall?

MW: Again, very supportive of all that. It’s my recollection that Paul Laxalt was one who organized a major opposition.

MW: And Hatch and Lugar.

MW: And Hatch and Lugar. I don’t know—I recall Laxalt having a major role in it. His major, major role was the Panama Canal, but in the labor law. Those were kind of the last things that Paul Laxalt did, after that he was a disinterested party until Reagan came to town.
DW: You were on the Finance Committee when the Roth-Kemp approach to fiscal policy began to develop some momentum. I am assuming that you were basically supportive of what was being done under the Roth-Kemp banner.

MW: Yes, I was a co-sponsor. In fact, I inherited it. One of the things that you may not remember is that the real predecessor to them was the Hansen-Steiker capital gains reduction. Hansen was my old colleague from Wyoming. Howard was very supportive of that, and I recall him being quite skeptical of Roth-Kemp when it started.

DW: But he appeared to do nothing to impede it.

MW: Again, that’s the same kind of thing as I described earlier. He was not inclined to wander in front of his chairmen or his troops unless there was some major philosophical reason why he would not, and then he was pretty up front about it.

DW: Did you endorse anyone for the Republican nomination for President in 1980?

MW: I endorsed Reagan.

DW: How did Senator Baker handle the situation in which he and at least one of his colleagues, Senator Dole, were both candidates and his Republican colleagues in the Senate were dividing themselves in support of various candidates? How did that affect the party in the Senate?

MW: Not particularly one way or the other. Howard was more courtly about those things than Bob Dole is. Dole is inclined to find revenge if he can, but Howard never did that.

DW: How would you generally characterize his effect on the Republic Party in the Senate as minority leader?

MW: It was very coalescing, very supportive, and very effective. He did a couple of things that Dole has never done. One is that he was able to think about tomorrow. He was a strategist, and he would sit down with people and think about how you get to a certain place that needs to be defended or promoted or whatever. So he would work with strategy; again, he had those meetings with his committee chairmen, and he was always in tune with where they were and where they wanted to go. That’s not to say we didn’t have some big-time divisions on a few things, but by and large he was able to get us more coalesced on more complex issues than Dole ever has.

DW: Both in the minority and the majority?

MW: Yes, both.
DW: It’s been said by some people that in terms of his general effect on the party as minority leader that, number one—and he was not alone in this—he promoted the idea that the minority party could become the majority party, if things were done correctly, could become the majority party in the foreseeable future. Number two, he encouraged people during those four years to think how they would handle things if they were in the majority, trying to combat against the minority mentality. How do you react to that?

MW: He did. One of the great strategists for getting us to majority status was Jesse Helms, for whom Howard had a great deal of affection. He allowed him a lot of free rein, because Jesse was the one who could concoct these votes that would quite starkly demonstrate the difference between Republicans and Democrats. Howard loved that; he didn’t do it himself, but he certainly did nothing to discourage it. As often as not, he would take the lead, once an idea was established, and sort of craft it so that it would really demonstrate a distinct difference and gave us a number of political issues on which to run.

DW: You’re talking about Senator Helms?

MW: No, Baker. Accepting Helms’ creativity in this area, Howard would often take a Helms idea and craft it into a slightly broader but even more devastating contrast.

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