

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH ROSS BAKER

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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and

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This is an interview with Professor Ross Baker of the Political Science Department at Rutgers-New Brunswick, on November 12, 2020. I am Shaun Illingworth. I am in Hightstown, New Jersey. I am joined by Jess Aumick. Jess, can you tell us where you are?

Jess Aumick: I am in Hackettstown, New Jersey.

SI: For the record, Dr. Baker, can you tell us where you are right now?

Ross Baker: I'm in Highland Park, New Jersey.

SI: Thank you very much for joining us. We have been looking forward to this. To begin, could you tell us where and when you were born?

RB: Yes, I was born June 26, 1938, at St. Agnes Hospital in Philadelphia. My parents were Augusta and Maurice Baker. At the time that I was born, my dad worked for his father, who was in the coal business. It was a time when people heated their houses with coal, and living in Pennsylvania, the coal of choice for heating your home was anthracite. My father worked at the coal yard on Oregon Avenue in Philadelphia. It was really quite a successful business that my grandfather had established after he immigrated to the United States in 1903 and was here by himself for seven years, my father's father, before my grandmother and three of her oldest children emigrated with her, one of whom was my father, and they settled in Philadelphia. My grandfather got into the coal business, and my father went to the coal business with him. Unfortunately, when my grandfather tired of the coal business, he left my father high and dry without a job, and my father decided to go into business for himself, which was retail heating oil.

He didn't have much money to start out with, but he managed to scrape together enough money to buy a truck in 1947. It was a red Chevrolet, a ton-and-a-half truck. It had a tank on the back, and he delivered oil. He drove the truck; my mom did the books. When the weather was bad, I would help my dad on the truck. One winter, I can remember quite vividly we tied Jeep cans to my sled and delivered oil to people. There was an oil shortage that winter. It was a hard business for my dad. It took a lot out of him. But the two of them made a modest success of it.

I went through the public schools of Philadelphia until the eighth grade. I had a tumultuous teenage period in my life, like so many people do. I just really was not cutting it as a student. [laughter] I seemed bound and determined to be failing all the courses that I took, including things I was supposed to be good at. I remember visiting the guidance counselor at my high school, and in subsequent conversations with other people who visited their guidance counselors, I think it's a common experience in which they give you sort of bizarre ideas about what you should do with your life. Well, this guidance counselor at Beeber Junior High School in Philadelphia advised me, based upon her examination of my records, that I should be a farmer, which when I told my parents, they were thunderstruck. [laughter] The idea of my being a farmer was not greeted with a lot of enthusiasm.

My parents decided to switch schools and sent me to a private school, Akiba Academy in Lower Merion Township in Philadelphia, right outside of Philadelphia, Montgomery County, in Bala Cynwyd. It changed my life. It was a much more easy-going environment. The junior high I

was in was highly structured, very regimental. We did things according to the blowing of a whistle by a guidance counselor. It was more like a prison than a school. The more relaxed atmosphere of the school basically subscribed to what was known as progressive education, which was basically the place where the core curriculum was first tried out. So, I did well there and applied for admission to colleges.

Well, the school that I went to had only been established ten years before, and so as a consequence, we didn't have much of a track record with the universities and colleges that we were applying to. I applied to Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. They turned me down. I was admitted to Saint Joseph's University, which was actually a neighborhood university, probably six blocks from where I grew up. But then I really drew the short straw and I was admitted to the University of Pennsylvania, which was certainly my first choice but seemed to me kind of a long shot, very selective, but they did know people who graduated from my high school and really had a lot of confidence in me.

I was able to get financial support from a Republican senator from Dauphin County, Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania has a system of senatorial scholarships, in which members of the state legislature are actually given grants to dispense to students. I had never met this state senator before, but we applied and he gave me a state scholarship, which was very helpful in getting through Penn.

I decided I would have to do more than just get that state scholarship, so I signed up for Air Force ROTC. I went in to take the test and discovered, much to my dismay, that I could never fly, which I really wanted to do, because I was colorblind, which changed my life. It didn't in the sense that I don't drive through red lights routinely [laughter] but certainly did not have the level of color perception acuity that you needed to be a pilot. That was a great disappointment to me, because I really did want to fly.

At any rate, I just decided to go ahead and take my courses. I did well at Penn, graduated, and went to law school and went to the University of Pennsylvania Law School, as a matter of fact. I guess I had a view of law school that many people have who have never gone through it. Probably had I decided on going to law school thirty years later, I probably would have enjoyed it, but at the time, the atmosphere in law school, their objective was to wash out as many people as possible. It was sort of, "Look to your right, look to your left, in three years' time, these two people will be gone, or you'll be gone." The treatment of women was--at the time, not many young men my age could be called feminists, by any stretch of the imagination, but it occurred to me that of all the people who were treated abominably at the University of Pennsylvania Law School, women by far were treated the worst. They weren't called on. They were treated like nonpersons. Interestingly, the two women in my law school class, one became a United States ambassador to Switzerland, and the other became a state supreme court justice. Both of my daughters went to law school, my oldest daughter to Emory and my youngest daughter to the University of Virginia Law School. Out of my unsuccessful career in law school, which caused me to drop out after the first semester, I did actually send two lawyers into the world, who are undoubtedly better than I ever would have been.

I didn't know exactly what to do after that and decided to try my hand at graduate school. The graduate school that was at hand was the University of Pennsylvania. I went and visited some of my old professors, and they welcomed me into the master's program. They advised me that it probably wasn't a good idea to get all of my degrees at one university. After I got my master's at Penn, I transferred to the University of California at Berkeley. I spent some time out there and left after year. I came back. This was basically a matter of a personal issue having to do with a relationship I had with a young woman, who at that time was going to Barnard College. Emotion triumphed over good common sense. [laughter] I came back to Penn and got my doctorate at Penn.

Then, I became involved in strategic studies, I guess you'd call it. One of my mentors at Penn was a retired Army colonel, and he was recruiting people to do government contract work. It was good because it was a job which I could do while I was studying and it wasn't unrelated to what I was doing, because it did involve foreign policy, to some degree, and my interest really, at that time, was in international relations. I became involved in this program, which was being run out of the University of Pennsylvania. At the time, I was really quite unaware of what the origins or sponsorship of the program was, but I became involved something called Operation Spice Rack, which was a program designed to destabilize the government of Cuba under Fidel Castro. The Kennedy family had this grudge against Fidel Castro, and Attorney General Robert Kennedy was very eager to see Castro overthrown. The Defense Department was involved in a very active program to destabilize the government of Cuba. I got I got involved in that. I did so, I suppose, out of the best patriotic motives, but I certainly had occasion later on to wonder why I did it. Like so many people who get involved in dubious activities, they really can't give you any satisfactory explanation, even though they've thought it through. At any rate, it helped pay my way through.

I then got a job with an organization called the Special Operations Research Office. I couldn't pull loose from this intelligence and military operations research. I went to Washington, D.C., in the Special Operations Research Office. It was a Pentagon operation. I became involved in something called Project Camelot, another ill-starred program, also directed at Latin America, which was actually exposed in *The Washington Post* by an enterprising reporter named Walter Pincus. Basically, the project was aimed at making sure that governments friendly to the United States were installed in Latin America.

I really think of myself very much as a product of the Cold War and a participant in the Cold War and feeling very much at the time as if I was advancing the interest of the United States. I won't say that I regret it, but I certainly have had occasion to look back and think about it and wondered why I threw myself into it with such enthusiasm and dedication.

SI: I just wanted to ask a question about that. Could you go into more detail about what you were actually doing? Were you just doing research and reports? What was your typical day like when you were doing these jobs?

RB: What I was basically doing was research, but I was going to be sent to Argentina. For what purposes? I don't know because, as I said, the project was the subject of an exposé in *The Washington Post* and it was cancelled. So, I never did find out what it was they wanted me to

do. We had people all over the world. We had a Vietnam group. We had a Middle Eastern group. I was, for some reason, put in the Latin American group, even though I didn't speak any Spanish. [laughter] If I were sent down to Argentina, I would be very, very conspicuous by my obvious ignorance of the of the language.

I was able to escape from that world and actually moved over to the Brookings Institution, a very respectable place to be. At the time, it was sort of known as a middle-of-the-road research organization. I think now it's more perceived as a liberal organization, although at the time it was known for its respectability more than anything else. It was a good launching pad actually for academia because Brookings was kind of like a university in many ways. There was an economic studies division, there was a governmental studies division, which almost looked like an economics department and a political science department. I got exposure to a lot of really very interesting people, including a wonderful, colorful Israeli researcher named Amos Perlmutter, who was a political scientist and who had a friend, a good friend, that he'd met, Benjamin Baker, interestingly enough, who at that time was chairman of the Political Science Department of Rutgers University. I really decided, while I was at Brookings, that what I really did want to do was get a job teaching in a university. He happened to know the chairman at Rutgers, and he gave me an introduction to Ben. We shared the last name, which was also kind of an interesting way of starting a relationship.

I remember my trip to New Brunswick. I went up by train. I remember leaving the station and walking up the hill on Easton Avenue and finding where the Political Science Department was, which was at what was known then as Williamson House, which was the headquarters of the Political Science Department, an old, mid-Victorian building on Union Street. It was called Williamson House because it was the home of the Williamson Family. There were two sisters, what were then referred to somewhat quaintly as maiden ladies. One of the things that Ben showed me when I came in was that the Williamson sisters had scratched their initials in the window with their diamond rings, which was very common in those days for young women to do.

I found the department very congenial, but I found Rutgers a very baffling place and have always taken time, when we're recruiting people, to explain the rather bizarre arrangement that Rutgers University was in 1969 when I arrived, which was that there were actually four political science departments. There was Rutgers College, which at that point was still a men's college. There was Douglass College, which of course was then a women's college, and just getting started at that time was Livingston College. Then, there was University College, which had a two-person department. Mapping out the geography of the Political Science Department in New Brunswick was kind of a challenge, but when you threw in the fact that there were political science departments in Newark and Camden, with whom we met once a year and solely for the purpose of promotions, it was really kind of hard to grasp the complexity of it. It really wasn't for another twelve years until the three departments, the three of the largest departments, were combined into a single department. [Editor's Note: In 1981, the separate faculties of the undergraduate colleges at Rutgers-New Brunswick were reorganized to form the Faculty of Arts and Sciences.]

We had many homes. We moved out of 36 Union Street. That was taken over, I believe, by teaching assistants from the English Department. We moved to Murray Hall, which was definitely a step up, except for the fact we were in the basement. However, I discovered that there was actually a room at the very top of the building, and I was able to get it for myself. I'm not a basement dweller. I liked the idea of being high up. It was large room, so I had lots of room.

At that time, I got very much interested in the textbooks that children in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century in America used, and I was interested in these textbooks as a means of political socialization, what children in the eighteenth and nineteenth century were learning about government from these books. One of the things I did was actually acquire a rather sizable library of early mostly history and geography textbooks. What they revealed is probably what you would expect, which showed a very ethnocentric view of the world. You know, they stressed the superiority of Europeans. They were very much interested in national character and would characterize the Spaniards as grave and dignified and the French as frivolous and fun-loving and the British just as hardworking and stoical and so on. It was fascinating stuff. Just being able to handle these centuries-old books and get the sense of what the students were learning, it was really fascinating. So, I stored them on shelves in this office in Murray Hall.

Murray Hall--I don't know if it's still the case, I haven't noticed it lately--Murray Hall was covered with ivy, as were some of the other buildings in the quad. What happened was we had a particularly cold winter, and mice used the ivy on the outside of Murray Hall to climb up and get access to my room and proceeded to eat the books because at that time the glue in the books was made with tallow, which was rendered fat, so it attracted them. When I would pull the books out, they would just come apart in my hands. So, I had these books that I really considered to be priceless, and they were basically in a state of collapse. I thought, "Well, perhaps the university might like to pay for having them rebound." I was introduced to the insurance department of the university, which was then referred to as the Department of Loss Control, which tells you something about how willing they were to pay for having my books rebound.

At any rate, our stay at Murray Hall was brief, because then of course the political science departments were consolidated when Edward Bloustein was president of Rutgers. President Bloustein was someone I was enormously fond of. I liked him very much. We found ourselves, the Rutgers College department, the Douglass College department, the Livingston department, all consolidated at [Hickman] Hall, on the Douglass Campus. Interestingly, at the time of consolidation, and we were told, "You will consolidate in one location." The only question was where. We were given the choice of the Livingston Campus or the Douglass College Campus, and one of the reasons why it did make sense at the time for us to consolidate at Douglass was its proximity to the Eagleton Institute of Politics, which in some ways was yet a fifth political science department and an institute which had gained a national reputation under the leadership of Don Herzberg for the work it did in state government. [Editor's Note: Edward J. Bloustein served as president of Rutgers University from 1971 until his death in 1989. The Eagleton Institute of Politics was established at Rutgers in 1956 through an endowment from Florence Peshine Eagleton. The Eagleton Institute is located in the historic house Wood Lawn on the Cook-Douglass Campus. Don Herzberg served as the executive director of the Eagleton Institute of Politics from 1956 to 1973.]

State government in political science has sort of been the never neverland, that you have a lot of people studying national politics and you have people studying local politics, but state politics didn't attract many people. One of the people it did attract was Alan Rosenthal, who was the deputy director of Eagleton and who made out of his state government project a major national resource, that they were able to get money to have summer institutes for members of the state legislatures, who were often overlooked. Members of Congress are sought out, mayors are sought out, members of state legislatures sometimes are just overlooked. Rosenthal made them the central focus of the center for state politics at Eagleton, and Eagleton became a state politics institution and someplace where somebody who was interested in American government ought to be. [Editor's Note: Alan Rosenthal served as a professor of political science at the Eagleton Institute of Politics from 1966 to 2013 and as executive director of the institute from 1974 to 1993.]

My trek to American government really went through a rather strange and circuitous route. When I was at the Brookings Institution, I was studying civil-military relations in Africa, and my focus was international relations and comparative politics. The first courses I taught at Rutgers were in international relations, American foreign policy, and comparative politics. The idea of teaching American government never occurred to me. I had taken American government as a minor field for my doctorate. What happened was that when I first came to Rutgers, I started doing some field research in Africa. I got some grant money to travel and to study armies in Africa in these newly independent countries in Africa. I traveled. I went to Ghana. I went to Sierra Leone, into Guinea, into the Ivory Coast, to Nigeria and to Senegal and to Mali and so on. That was my domain, and I considered myself an Africanist and somebody who was also interested in military affairs and so on.

Then, something happened that was beyond my control. That was that a scandal erupted in the African studies field, in which a number of American scholars who had been studying in Africa were revealed to have been funded by the Central Intelligence Agency. This basically shut down the welcome that we had in these African countries, that American scholars were now under suspicion. Then, doubling down on the calamity was the fact that the legitimacy of white scholars doing research in Africa came to be an issue in the African Studies Association, and the feeling was that somehow white scholars really just didn't belong studying in Africa or studying African or African American politics, that this really should properly be the realm of African American scholars.

What I discovered was that not only was my access to field research blocked, but the legitimacy of what I was doing was under question. By this time, I'd already gotten tenure as an Africanist and comparative politics scholar. What am I going to do with the rest of my career? I had tenure. I could have, if I had been completely unprincipled, simply said, "Okay, Rutgers can't fire me. I'm going to now kind of sit back and draw a paycheck for the next forty years." But I'm not cut out to think that way. I said, "Well, how do I retool, and what subject can I tackle that is going to be fulfilling for me, interesting for me?"

At that time, there was a need for somebody to teach American government, which was an introductory course. Every political science department in the country teaches American

government. We had to have somebody to do it. My only qualification for teaching American government was that I took American government as a minor field for my doctorate at the University of Pennsylvania, so I knew something but not a lot. I started teaching American government, just basically staying a week ahead of the students in the textbook. To me, this was very troubling. I really felt that if I were to be lecturing in this area, I would really need to be doing research in the area. We need to have some kind of experience. Since I am an experiential learner, I decided, "Well, here I have, for a couple of semesters, been talking about American government. Yet I never actually spent any time in American government." So, I made a rather, it turned out, fateful decision.

At that time, I was married and my oldest daughter was probably around four years old. I decided to move the family to Washington, D.C. I managed to, I'll almost say, apprentice myself to a United States senator, and this happened in a rather interesting way. I was able to gain entry into a senator's office by reason of a rather interesting coincidence. I had mentioned Amos Perlmutter, the Israeli scholar who I had met at the Brookings Institution. Amos introduced me to friends of his at the Israeli embassy in Washington. There was a party for the Israeli national day. The ambassador, at the time, was Yitzhak Rabin, who was later to become the prime minister of Israel and was tragically assassinated. There was a reception in honor of Rabin, and I was invited to it with my wife. [Editor's Note: Yom Ha'atzmaut is celebrated annually in April or May to commemorate Israel's declaration of statehood in 1948. Yitzhak Rabin served as the Israeli ambassador to the United States from 1968 to 1973 and as the prime minister of Israel from 1974 to 1977 and again from 1992 until his assassination in 1995.]

My first wife grew up in Virginia, went to school in Virginia, and went to college at Smith College in Massachusetts, but she was a Virginia girl. We were at the party. She said, "Oh, I see somebody here I recognize." I said, "Well, who?" She pointed to a man across the room. She said, "That's Phil Foisie." The name didn't mean anything to me, and she said, "He is the managing editor of *The Washington Post*." Anyhow, she went over, and it was like a big family reunion for her because they had been neighbors at Parkfairfax, which was an apartment development in Virginia where they both lived. She introduced me to Phil. Phil and I got to talking, you know, the usual Washington conversation, "Where are you? Are you in government, are you a lobbyist, what?" I said, "Well, I'm at the Brookings Institute." He says, "Oh, really, what are you doing?" I said, "I'm studying the militaries of Africa." He says, "That's really interesting." He said, "You know, we really need a piece in the Sunday 'Outlook' section, an essay, a really lengthy essay, on Africa. We don't do much reporting there. We occasionally get reports from stringers in Nairobi or in West Africa." He said, "How about giving us a good fifteen-hundred, two-thousand-word piece on the current political situation in Africa?" I said, "Sure, I'd be happy to do it." So, I did it and they liked it and they ran the story. So, I had a connection to *The Washington Post*.

When I got to Rutgers, I had a few ideas for articles that I sent to *The Post*, and they liked them. I developed a relationship with Howard Simons, who at that time was the managing editor of *The Post*, and it was at this point that Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein were exposing the Watergate scandal. So, I was connected to this amazing newspaper that was really doing the job of dismantling the corruption of the of the Nixon Administration. I became a more or less regular contributor to the Sunday "Outlook" section of *The Washington Post*.

Then, I figured, "Well, if *The Washington Post* is interested in what I have to say, let me try *The New York Times*." So, I started submitting pieces to *The New York Times* to a wonderful guy who ran the op-ed page, a grumpy, old-school *New York Times* person named Howard Goldberg. For several years, I would do op-eds for *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. It became, for me, more than just a sideline. It thrust me into the somewhat uncomfortable position of people calling me a public intellectual, which was a heavy burden to bear at the time, but what it meant to me, and what I think it means to most people, is somebody who is an academic but communicates with a non-academic world, who is able to translate what he or she does in research and teaching and so on to the general public. It sent me on a parallel career of writing for newspapers.

Since that time, I've written for an array of newspapers, *Long Island Newsday*, *The Arizona Republic*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Tribune* and so on. My current journalistic home is with *USA Today*. I was invited to join their staff of contributors and actually be chosen to be on their board of contributors by Owen Ullmann, a former student of mine from the first class I taught at Rutgers. He was a Henry Rutgers fellow. He left Rutgers, went to journalism school, became a journalist first for the *Detroit Free Press* and then ultimately with *USA Today* and rose to become the editor of *USA Today*. So, I've always had a warm spot in my heart for journalists, and so many of my students went into journalism, including Carrie Budoff [Brown], who is now the editor of *Politico*. She and her twin sister were students of mine as undergraduates at Rutgers. That's been a separate career.

Then, there's a third track, which was, in my effort to learn something about American government, using this *Washington Post* connection to insert myself into the office of then Minnesota Senator Walter Mondale. In 1975, I took my family to Washington. We rented a house on Jocelyn Street in the Chevy Chase section of Washington. My wife was pregnant with my second daughter, who was born in George Washington Hospital on the 28th of August in 1975. I started with Mondale, and basically that was my introduction to the world of the United States Senate, which was to become my world for the rest of my career.

I spent several months with Senator Mondale, and it was a very strange time in his career. He had actually hoped to run in the 1976 Democratic presidential primary elections, but he decided against it. It was a very crowded field. There were sixteen Democrats interested in getting the nomination that year, because what happened was, of course, that Richard Nixon had resigned. Gerald Ford had succeeded him, and the Democrats, not surprisingly, saw him as an easy target to knock off. So, there was a lot of enthusiasm among congressional Democrats, Democratic governors and so on to run that year. Mondale originally gave it consideration and then abandoned the idea.

I learned something about what happens to senators who spend a lot of time trying to build a reputation to compete for the party nomination, and that is they lose touch with the Senate. They come back to the Senate and they're rather like strangers and objects, in some ways, of pity on the part of their colleagues because they've sort of deserted the institution. Mondale, at that time, was just kind of looking for something to do. Ultimately, of course, he was rescued from the

Senate by Jimmy Carter, who ultimately got the nomination. He became Jimmy Carter's vice-presidential candidate. Carter won, and Mondale became Vice President of the United States.

I left Mondale simply because I just didn't feel enough was going on there. He was kind of searching for things to do. I went and joined the staff of Senator Birch Bayh from Indiana, probably one of the most underestimated senators of the twentieth century, and the man responsible for the 25th Amendment to the Constitution, which provides for the orderly succession in the presidency and the ability of the cabinet and Congress to remove a defective president from office other than by impeachment. I wrote his campaign speeches. It was a great experience. I traveled with him. I went to Michigan with him. I went to Massachusetts with him and to Maryland and so on. He wasn't successful, and his campaign folded after the Massachusetts primary in 1976, by the way, a very good basketball year for Rutgers. He was from Indiana. Of course, Indiana was the other basketball power at the time. [Editor's Note: Birch Evans Bayh, Jr. (1928-2019) represented Indiana in the United States Senate from 1963 to 1981. In 1976, the Rutgers Men's Basketball Team entered the NCAA Tournament undefeated and ranked fourth in the nation. In the semifinal game, Rutgers was defeated by Michigan, 86-70. Rutgers then lost the third-place game to UCLA. Indiana, also undefeated that season, won the tournament.]

When his campaign folded, I joined the presidential campaign of Senator Frank Church of Idaho, who, in many ways, that was the senator with whom I really established the closest personal bond. He was a wonderful man. He got a late start in the 1976 campaign because he was conducting hearings of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee into the illegal activities by the Central Intelligence Agency. He had promised the Democratic Majority Leader Mike Mansfield that he would conclude the business of the CIA committee before he went out to run for president, and so it gave him a late start. By the time he really got into it, Jimmy Carter pretty much had the Democratic nomination wrapped up. He challenged Carter in Nebraska and actually won the Nebraska primary, but at that point, it was too late. I went to Idaho with him for his announcement. I traveled with him, got to know the Church family, wonderful people. I got to know something about the state of Idaho, a very beautiful place whose politics are very different now than they were in 1976. I can't see Idaho electing a Democratic senator anytime soon. [Editor's Note: Frank Church (1924-1984) served in the U.S. Senate from Idaho from 1957 to 1981. He chaired the Senate Foreign Relations Committee from 1979 to 1981. Michael Mansfield (1903-2001) represented Montana in the U.S. Senate from 1953 to 1977. He served as Senate Majority Leader from 1961 to 1977.]

Church asked me to stay behind. He said, "We work well together." He said, "I'd like to have you in my office in Washington." It was very interesting because I was tempted. I had fallen in love with the United States Senate, which doomed me for my career to love an institution that does not necessarily love you back. I gave it some serious thought, and I talked to people in Washington, who said, "Don't do it. Go back to the academic world. You'll be a happier person. If you're concerned about security, the world of politics is not a place to be." Interestingly enough, my academic colleagues said, "Oh, no, you should take the job in the Senate."

I was getting this conflicting information but resolved it in favor of coming back to the academic world and using the experience that I had acquired in the year that I had spent in Washington to

really teach American government from the point of view of somebody who had actually been there. I had touched the bones. Touching the bones has really been the methodology, if you will, of my work over the ensuing fifty years, and that is that in order to know the institution, you have to know the people who work in the institution, the senators or the members of the House of Representatives. I was able to go with confidence into my American government class and say to my students, "Look, this is the way it really is. The textbook is fine. It's going to give you the black letter law, but here's an insight that I got in a Senate office that you would not necessarily get from the textbook." I thought that was important for the students, for the students to have some of the nuance rather than just the bare factual information or the state of the research in the area. I was able to talk about the research, what scholars were learning about Congress, but I also had the insider's perspective as well, which I believe the students really enjoyed. Great anecdotes were the kind of thing that were often mentioned in my student evaluations.

Having spent some time on my first sabbatical, a whole year, in the United States Senate, by the time my next sabbatical came up, which was in 1982, I thought to myself, "I'd like to do the same thing again," that is, go back to Washington, "but I think maybe it ought to be to the House of Representatives." I needed to give the south side of the Capitol a little of my attention. By this time, I had friends who worked in Congress. I had connections that I could use, and I spent my next sabbatical on the staff of the Democratic Caucus in the United States House of Representatives. The chairman of the caucus at that time was a man who was a member of one of the illustrious political families of Louisiana, Gillis W. Long, and Congressman Gillis Long was just a dear man who represented the area around Baton Rouge. It gave me the sense of the House of Representatives as a very different place from the United States Senate. [Editor's Note: Gillis William Long (1923-1985) represented Louisiana's 8th District in the House of Representatives from 1963 to 1965 and again from 1973 to 1985. He was the nephew of Huey Long, the governor of Louisiana who was assassinated in 1935, after which his wife Rose Long replaced him in the Senate. Huey Long's brother Earl Long went on to serve as the governor of Louisiana, and his son Russell B. Long served as a U.S. Senator from 1948 to 1987 and chaired the Senate Finance Committee.]

First of all, its size was a little bit intimidating. The Senate was like a club and had always been likened to a club, whereas the House of Representatives is more like being in a large suburban high school. In the Senate, the people stood out more distinctly as individuals. In the House of Representatives, it was a little bit like, "Well, you've got the captain of the basketball team. You've got the editor of the yearbook," and so on, a kind of analogy to a big high school, a big cast of characters.

The group that I became associated with was a group of Democrats who almost don't exist anymore, conservative Southern Democrats and Sunbelt Democrats, who were in the in the process of becoming obsolete, that the South was marching fairly steadily into the Republican camp, and these were people who when I knew them in 1982 and 1983 were barely hanging on to their seats in Oklahoma, in Georgia, in Texas. Had I known then what I know now about what was going to happen to them, I think I've probably would have had a greater degree of sympathy with their plight and why and how they were forced to differ from the larger part of the caucus, which was more liberal, represented big cities in the North and so on. So, these were sort of the

odd men and the odd women out, mostly men. It was an interesting period because the Democratic Party was in transition. It was shedding its southern roots, which it had had since before the Civil War, and was becoming largely a northern and western party.

I got to know a lot of members of the of the Democratic Caucus. It was an interesting and exciting year. 1982 was the Ronald Reagan's first midterm election. The country was in recession. Unemployment in the United States had gone above ten percent for the first time since the Great Depression. The Republicans lost. They should have lost worse. They lost twenty-six seats in the election of 1982. Had the Democrats pressed their advantage, they probably would have won even more.

It's interesting reflecting on the Democrats who were elected that year. Some of them are still in Congress. I noticed the other day, Representative Marcy Kaptur of Ohio was one of the Democrats who was considered to be an unlikely victor in the 1982 election. She came to Washington to try to get money and support from the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, but they considered her chances of winning so remote that they refused to give her money. She went to Congressman Long, who was the head of the caucus and the man who was my host, and he said, "Well," he said, "I can't give you any money." But he said, "Why don't you have a have an auction? Let me give you some political memorabilia that you can auction off to raise some money." Marcy Kaptur did it, and she won that year improbably and has been there ever since 1982. She is really one of the senior members of the Democratic Caucus in the in the House of Representatives. [Editor's Note: Marcy Kaptur has represented Ohio's 9th District in the House of Representatives since 1983.]

That was the year that introduced me to the House of Representatives, and now I had a basis for comparison. I got a call one day, it must have been probably in 1985, from a woman who worked for an organization that was affiliated with Georgetown University. It was called the Government Affairs Institute. She said, "Well, I've read your work in *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*." She said, "I teach courses for federal government employees in Washington." She said, "Would you know a book that compared the House and Senate, or would you be able to give a lecture to employees of the Interior Department or the Department of Defense about the differences between the House and Senate? I mean, their budgets are decided by the House and Senate. They ought to know something about these institutions up on Capitol Hill. They're in the Pentagon. They're on the other side of the river in Virginia. If they're the Agriculture Department, they're downtown and so on. Can you give us a lecture on the differences between the House and the Senate?" I said, "Well, let me let me find the book on the subject." It turns out that there wasn't the book. No one had ever bothered to write a book about the differences between the House and Senate. There were great books about the Senate and great books about the House [laughter], but somehow nobody had put it together and made it accessible to a general audience, not a heavy duty, ponderous study, but rather something that could be read and enjoyed by upper-level undergraduates and by educated laypeople.

I set to work, and I used basically the formula that I had set my path on when I first decided to take my sabbaticals in Washington, which was touch the bones. What that meant was talking to people who had served in both the House and Senate. Rather than burden serving senators, I decided to interview former senators who had previously served in the House of Representatives

and people who had recently retired. There's an organization called the Association of Former Members of Congress, and they were able to supply me with their contact information. I contacted these retired senators who had previously been members of the House of Representatives and decided to interview them in person. I got a grant from the Everett Dirksen Foundation, basically for travel money. I began life on the Metroliner. At that time, the Metroliner stopped in New Brunswick. I was able to hop on the train and go to Washington and interview members of Congress, but not just to Washington, because not all of them stayed in Washington.

I remember one notable interview that I had with Margaret Chase Smith, who was a senator from Maine and who in 1950 was the first and only Senator to stand up--a Republican also--stand up and condemn the behavior of Senator Joseph McCarthy, the demagogic senator from Wisconsin who had done so much damage to American government. I remember visiting her at her home in Skowhegan, Maine on a lake. It was a wonderful experience visiting Senator Joseph S. Clark in his home in Chestnut Hill in Philadelphia. Visiting these ex-senators in their homes, they were telling me about their transitions from the House to the Senate, the differences, what they perceived as the differences, how their careers and lives were changed by being in the Senate, and how it kind of built on their experiences from the House of Representatives.

The product of that was my first and most successful book, which had the title *House and Senate*. I decided that that's what it was about and there was no point in beating around the bush and trying to find some particularly catchy title. [laughter] That's the title I gave it. It went into four successive editions, and it was, for W.W. Norton, my publisher, a great commercial success, adopted in many, many Congress courses or American government courses. It still sells a few copies, which is kind of nice. I don't get huge royalty checks, but it's nice to know that some people are still using it and it's still valid. If you actually go to Washington and go to the basement of the Russell Senate Office Building, where the Senate Library is, there's a glass case on the wall of what the Librarian of the Senate considers the best books on the United States Senate, and one of them is *House and Senate*. That, to me, was always a great accolade and one that was just so satisfying.

Then, for a period of time, and mostly for personal reasons, I abandoned the Washington sabbatical. Other things were going on in my life, personal things and so on, which served as a distraction, in some ways a pleasant distraction, in other ways a not so pleasant distraction. But I decided, with the turn of the century, that I was going to resume my Washington sabbaticals, and I decided, "Well, I've spent some time in the Senate with the Democrats. I've spent some time in the House with the Democrats. I need to get myself a Republican." I contacted Senator Chuck Hagel from Nebraska and really established one of the really lasting and enduring friendships with a politician that I've ever had. Chuck Hagel is an amazing guy, a wounded veteran from Vietnam who became a successful businessman, an early telecom millionaire, who decided to run for Congress and won a seat as a Republican senator from Nebraska. [Editor's Note: Chuck Hagel served in the U.S. Senate from Nebraska from 1997 to 2009 and as the U.S. Secretary of Defense from 2013 to 2015, during the presidency of Barack Obama.]

I remember that I made the contact with him, and he agreed to have me come to his office. I was down in Washington for some other purpose. I was going into the New Jersey Avenue entrance

to the Russell Building, and I ran into Senator Hagel coming out. He said to me, "Hey, Ross, how'd you like to go to Russia with me?" I said, "Sure." So, I became part of a congressional delegation in 2000 that was going to Russia to meet the newly established head of the Russian government, Vladimir Putin.

It was a very interesting experience going on the plane to Russia and then to the annual Munich Security Conference meeting in February of 2000 with a planeload of very famous people. Zbigniew Brzezinski was my seatmate. Senator John McCain was on the plane. Senator Joseph Lieberman was on the plane. It was really an incredibly interesting experience. On our way to the Vnukovo Airport in Moscow, we got a message [laughter] from the embassy that Vladimir Putin had just spent several hours with Madeleine Albright, who apparently had given him a very tough time, and he didn't want to see any more Americans. So, we did not have an audience with Vladimir Putin [laughter], but clearly we were going to Moscow. [Editor's Note: Madeleine Albright served as the U.S. Secretary of State from 1997 to 2001, during the presidential administration of Bill Clinton.]

We landed at the airport in a blizzard, and we were taken to the National Hotel, in a room which was undoubtedly bugged by the KGB, and went out for a night on the town. We had a Marine escort. I went out with several House members and the Marines and we walked through Red Square. It was kind of a melancholy experience because this was really at the low point after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and there were Russian soldiers selling their uniforms in Red Square. The guard in front of Lenin's tomb, it wasn't supposed to be open at night, but they let us know if we slipped them some American currency that we could get in to see Lenin's tomb. It was a novel experience. I can say that I was in Russia at a very critical time in its history.

The following day we met with members of the Duma, the Russian parliament, and they occupy a rather grand building, probably dating back to the days of the czars. We were waiting for a meeting with the head parliamentarian. We had had a very sumptuous breakfast at the National Hotel, and they had this enormous display of Russian smoked salmon. It was just delicious, and I loaded my plate several times. It made me very thirsty. We were standing in the antechamber of the Duma. I said, "I've got to have something to drink." I noticed over in the corner there was a water fountain. I walked over to it. It was a water fountain, and there was a battered tin cup attached by a chain to the wall, which was what you were supposed to drink out of. The Marine gunnery sergeant, who was with me, said to me, "Professor Baker, you'd be better off drinking from the toilet," which was kind of a commentary on the low state to which the former Soviet Union had fallen.

We went to the Munich Security Conference afterward, and I really got to know Senator Hagel very well. We went to the beer halls in Munich and made the circuit of those. I really got to know him. But his office was not particularly well run. I liked him personally, but for some reason, his press secretary took a dislike to me. It made my life kind of unhappy there, and I decided I needed to bail out. I bailed into a good place through the help of a friend of mine who did Democratic media in Washington. Peter Fenn introduced me to the chief of staff to Senator Patrick Leahy of Vermont, a wonderful man, who, if the Democrats were to have been lucky on November 3rd and gotten the majority in the Senate, would have returned to his former exalted post as president pro tempore of the Senate, which is given to the senior member of the majority

party. [Editor's Note: Senator Patrick Leahy has served in the U.S. Senate since 1975. On January 20, 2021, he became president pro tempore of the Senate. Previously, he held the position from 2012 to 2015.]

Senator Leahy was elected in 1974. He's still serving in the Senate, and he and I became just very, very close friends in a really personal way. I liked him enormously. I liked his staff. One of the things I learned is that if you're looking for a congressional office to work in, look for the ones that have low turnover. High turnover in staff is an indication of an unhappy office and a mean and out-of-control boss and you certainly don't want that. That was certainly not the case with Senator Leahy. Many of the people who served with him when he first entered the United States Senate are still there. It's quite remarkable that people have spent their careers with one senator, a wonderful man.

Then, having spent time in the Senate, having had my token experience with a Republican, I decided in in 2008, I'd like to come back to Washington. I made the acquaintance of a former Rutgers student, in fact, who used to serve as a server for dinners at the Eagleton Institute, a woman named Susan McHugh, who started out as the receptionist in the office of Nevada Senator Harry Reid, but it ended up, as so often is the case with lowly staffers who ascend to great power in the Senate, was now his chief of staff. I had a Rutgers connection, Senator Reid's chief of staff. I contacted Susan McHugh, and I said, "Hey, I'd like to spend some time with you guys," and of course she knew who I was. I spent my sabbatical in 2008 with a member of the party leadership, which is something I hadn't done before. At that time, Senator Reid was the majority leader. The Democrats had taken the majority in the Senate in 2006. So, he'd been pretty well established as a majority leader. It was a great experience, and it gave me a kind of synoptic view of the Senate that I hadn't had from these individual offices. You could just see the Senate and all of its diversity, and you could see the lines of communication running from Reid's office to the to the Appropriations Committee and the Committee on Environment and Public Works, the interactions between the majority leader and the Democratic senators. One of the things that Senator Reid had was a luncheon with senators to which staff were actually invited to attend. It was really interesting to watch him interacting with the Democratic senators and with the guests that we had who came to talk with the senators. It was a great experience, and I repeated it in 2012, which, again, he was still the majority leader. It was also a very fulfilling experience. [Editor's Note: Harry Reid represented Nevada in the United States Senate from 1987 to 2017. He served as Senate Majority Leader from 2007 to 2015.]

In 2016, I went back. This time, unfortunately, he was not majority leader anymore, and the difference was monumental. While we were basically running the ship in 2008 and 2012, in 2016 the most frequently uttered phrase was, "I wonder what Mitch is going to be doing?" Mitch, of course, was Senator Mitch McConnell, who now may well be, in the 117th Congress, the majority leader once again, but that will depend on these two run-off elections in Georgia, which are going to take place on the 6th of January. We don't know what the outcome of that will be, but as of this time, he is still the majority leader because the Republicans have more senators than the Democrats do. [Editor's Note: Mitch McConnell has represented Kentucky in the United States Senate since 1985. From 2015 to 2021, he served as the Senate Majority Leader. He was succeeded by Senator Chuck Schumer of New York, after the Georgia runoff elections on January 6, 2021 produced two Democratic victories, thus making the split in the

Senate 50-50 and with Vice President Kamala Harris, a Democrat, holding the decisive vote in any tie between Republicans and Democrats.]

It's interesting because in the time I spent with Senator Reid, one of the things I enjoyed the most was hanging out with the journalists who wait in the hallway outside the Senate chamber after the Tuesday lunches that the Democrats and Republicans had in two rooms in the Capitol. It's known as the stakeout, and the stakeout was one of my favorite things because I got to meet some of these wonderful journalists who cover Congress, meeting Paul Kane from *The Washington Post* or Alex Bolton from *The Hill* or Carl Hulse from *The New York Times*, really knowledgeable, smart people, who really know the way Congress works and present it to their readers in a comprehensible and engaging way.

It also gave me an interesting opportunity, one of these funny situations. This would have been in 2016; I had an operation on my foot. I had a bunion operation and was forced to wear a surgical boot for several weeks. By the time I went to Washington, I was all healed and my foot was in regular footwear and so on. I was in one of these stakeouts, and I noticed that Senator Mitch McConnell's press secretary, a guy named Don Stewart, known familiarly as Stew, was wearing a surgical boot. I looked at him and I pointed at his surgical boot and I kind of pantomimed to him, "Bunion?" He nodded, and I gave him a thumbs up. So, he came over and he said, "Did you have the operation?" [laughter] I said, "Yes." We began to discuss our bunion operations, and he and I became fast friends. Here I was in the office of Harry Reid, the minority leader, and he was the communications director and deputy chief of staff for Mitch McConnell, the majority leader. It gave me a very interesting avenue into McConnell's office. One of the interesting experiences I gave to my students was meeting Mitch McConnell, who, by the way, they found to be a very engaging person. All of these kids, who I'm sure were hardcore Democratic liberals, really enjoyed meeting McConnell. It was one of the things I was able to do for my students.

Another thing I was able to do, using the relationships that I had in Washington, was to introduce my students in person to these people that they'd read about as political science students studying American government. Back in 1994, I decided to have a seminar, which focused on current politics, just a bunch of students who I picked from my American government class--I didn't pick, but my teaching assistants picked out from my American government class, people who had an unusually avid interest in politics. I asked them to choose a dozen students, thirteen students actually. It came to be known as "Baker's Dozen." I would run it every other year, every even-numbered year which there was a congressional election, sometimes obviously coinciding with the presidential election, and I met with the students in my home in Highland Park. I was able to continue that process up until this past year. I would have been teaching it in the fall semester. I would be teaching it right now in my home with the fireplace going and sitting around with thirteen wonderful students talking about the congressional election. Also, I managed to get money to take them on a trip to Washington, an overnight trip to Washington, to meet members of Congress, meet the journalists, meet lobbyists, people who gave them a sense of the richness of American politics and being able to personalize it and to touch the bones, as I have.

One of the great regrets that I've had is I've not been able to teach the course this year. I was ready to go. I would have made the arrangements. We would have met probably with Senator Leahy and perhaps with Senator McConnell, and we would have met with Carrie Budoff at the *Politico* offices in Virginia and with the people at *USA Today*. We would have met with Paul Kane from *The Washington Post* and so on. The students who are in "Baker's Dozen" this year, who I meet on Zoom conference, are just a wonderful group of students who I would love to have lavished this experience on, but it's the world we live in under this cloud. That it should happen this late in my career, I think, is a particular disappointment.

It's interesting because this particular group of students I'm extraordinarily fond of. While we meet on Wednesday morning and in a Zoom conference, what I've done, I've done the best I could, I couldn't take them to Washington, I took Washington to them. We've had visits on Zoom from two members of Congress, Congressman Frank Pallone from our own 6th Congressional District and Congressman Tom Malinowski from the 7th Congressional District, and then some of my journalist friends have come and talked about how they saw the congressional elections. Right now, we're doing a kind of postmortem on the congressional elections, and we've had, in the post-election period, Kirk Bado from *National Journal* and next week we're having Andy Duehren from *The Wall Street Journal* come and talk to us about how they see the aftermath of the 2020 congressional election and presidential election. Again, trying to make bricks without straw, I've been trying to come up with something that is meaningful for my students and gives them a sense of the richness of American politics.

SI: We have covered a lot of ground there. Let me ask Jess if she has a question, and then I have to, unfortunately, end a little early today because my wife teaches high school and she has to do parent-teacher conferences over Zoom.

RB: I'm totally sympathetic to that. My stepson and his wife and their two children live next door, and they live with all the Zoom conferences with kids and with teachers. My heart goes out to you.

SI: Jess, do you have a question?

JA: I do not have one. I actually just got unexpectedly called into work.

SI: Okay, all right.

RB: Well, look, if you have any other questions you want me to elaborate on anything, we can schedule [another interview].

SI: We will stop here, and then we will set another appointment.

RB: Sure.

SI: Yes, let me just pause.

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