EDWARD M. KENNEDY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL FRAZIER

March 29, 2007
Washington, D.C.

Interviewer

University of Virginia

Stephen Knott

EDWARD M. KENNEDY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL FRAZIER

March 29, 2007

Stephen Knott: Thank you again for agreeing to do this, for inviting us to your home.

Michael Frazier: Sure.

Knott: If you could just tell us how you first came in contact with Senator Kennedy, you mentioned before we put the recorder on that you had worked in his ’80 Presidential campaign.

Frazier: Yes. I was living in Boston in 1979 and remember all of the things leading up to the upcoming Presidential race. Is he going to run, is he not going to run? As early as the summer of 1979, I remember seeing a motorcade going around Boston, and you could tell that it was a Secret Service motorcade, and it was Senator Kennedy, because the U.S. government had given him protection prior to his announcing for President. There was all the big lead-in to what became a November announcement at Faneuil Hall in Boston. I actually took work off that day and went to Faneuil Hall and saw him announce his run for the Presidency of the United States.

As an African American kid growing up in small town Pennsylvania in the ’60s, the big issues in my family were the Kennedys and the [Martin Luther] Kings. I knew at that point in time this was something important. I really wanted to have a role in Presidential politics, and I wanted to go and work for Senator Kennedy on his Presidential race. That’s what prompted me then to quit my job and move to Washington. I started out as a volunteer for the campaign and I volunteered maybe for three or four months. They liked my work and they hired me. I was hired by the deputy campaign manager, a gentleman by the name of Ron Brown, who was the late U.S. Secretary of Commerce under President [William Jefferson] Clinton. I joined the campaign on a full-time basis in January of 1980. I was sent out to different states to do field organizing, which is essentially identifying supporters and getting them to the polls on primary day.

On numerous occasions I was put in places where I would have interaction with the minority community, because that was the area that I was focusing on. I also set up events for the Senator to come and speak to voters. That’s when I really got involved with Senator Kennedy. I had met him for the first time in a meeting in Pittsburgh, leading up to the Pennsylvania primary with then Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm. We had a meeting with the identified black leadership in Pittsburgh in a hotel room in the Hilton Hotel. That was my first real interaction with the Senator, and then it carried on from there into other states as the primary season went on. I went from Pennsylvania to Maryland, Maryland to New Jersey and played the same role in all of those states. That’s how the relationship began and grew.

Knott: You officially joined his Senate staff in 1985, is that correct?

Frazier: Correct. July of 1985.

Knott: What are your recollections of those early days? Did Senator Kennedy interview you, for instance?

Frazier: I was interviewed by a woman, Ranny Cooper. Larry Horowitz was the chief of staff then, and Ranny was deputy chief of staff. I went through the interview process in which I was identified by the political director, then political director of Kennedy's office, Bill Carrick, and then through Bill and through Ranny Cooper they brought me in to see Larry Horowitz. Larry Horowitz and I went through an interview. After I passed muster there, so to speak, they brought me in to see the Senator. The Senator was very kind to give me his blessing, and so I started working there in July of 1985. I succeeded a woman who is the daughter of Reverend Andrew Young, Andrea Young. I don't know actually if she's on your list of people to talk to, but Andrea is somebody who can also talk to you about the history of the civil rights piece as it relates to Senator Kennedy.

Knott: That's good to know.

Frazier: You may want to talk to Andrea and also her father because he could tell you more in terms of the Senator's role in the civil rights movement in the '60s.

Knott: Great.

Frazier: I passed muster and was hired in July of 1985.

Knott: Could you tell us some of the first issues that you had to deal with? I can tell you with the timeline we have, it was a busy time in terms of antiapartheid legislation. There was the appointment of [William Bradford] Brad Reynolds as Associate Attorney General. I don't know if you were involved in either of those.

Frazier: Yes, and in fact the first week of my working in the Senate office, the Senator agreed to do an interview on *Nightline* with Ted Koppel. Greg Craig, who was the Senator's chief person on foreign policy, and I were assigned to go with the Senator over to *Nightline*. We put together talking points for him for the conversation. Also, the Senator had agreed to debate the then South Africa Foreign Minister, a gentleman by the name of Pik Botha. We go to *Nightline* and he goes into makeup, he does his prep, and Greg and I talk to him about the points we want to make, and why it's important for the U.S. to impose sanctions against South Africa because of apartheid. He did the interview with Koppel, and debated Botha, and he did a fabulous job. That was my very first week on the job. I started on Monday and on Tuesday or Wednesday night we were at *Nightline* doing this debate on South Africa. It was very much a learning process for me too, because while I was familiar with the issue of South Africa and apartheid, I wasn't completely familiar in the sense of knowing exactly all that was going on. It also was a real beginning in my seeing how near and dear this issue was to Ted Kennedy.

In my view, this was Ted Kennedy reliving the civil rights era all over again, doing it not in a domestic aspect, but doing it in a foreign policy aspect.

Knott: And the Brad Reynolds nomination, do you recall anything in regard to that?

Frazier: I do to a degree, but I have to say that probably Carolyn [Osolinik] and Jeff [Blattner] were more involved in that. I was not greatly involved in the Brad Reynolds nomination; probably it was too early on for me to become involved in that.

The paramount issue for me at the very beginning was the apartheid piece. As time went on, I got more involved in other issues, but Brad Reynolds was not one of them.

Knott: What about [Robert] Bork?

Frazier: Yes, Bork was a very big issue for me. We at the Kennedy office had heard different names of people who President [Ronald] Reagan would put forward. Bork was on that list, and because they were excellent staff people, Carolyn Osolinik and Jeff Blattner had done the homework, and had talked about who Robert Bork was and what he stood for, and more importantly, what he stood against. I had a lot of conversations with them about Bork. We pretty much knew where we were going to stand.

I was very very proud that within an hour of the White House announcing Robert Bork's nomination to the Supreme Court, Senator Kennedy was on the floor of the United States Senate opposing that nomination, and telling in very stark views why he opposed that nomination. I was very proud of that, because a lot of that had to do with his views on civil rights. Within an hour of the Senator's speech, my phone was ringing off the hook from people all over the country who were calling to say how proud they were that Senator Kennedy had announced that he was going to lead a battle against the Bork nomination. That really was a great learning lesson for me, because as I'm taking all these phone calls from people who are very prominent in the civil rights movement, it really crystallized in my mind who Ted Kennedy was in relation to the civil rights movement.

We had a bit of a war room operation where we decided what was the best attack for us to oppose this nomination. We had to figure out at that point in time who sat on the Senate Judiciary Committee, and who we could talk to about joining Kennedy in this fight against Bork. This was particularly important as it related to Senators from the South, because even though the majority of the African American population at that time was in northeastern cities, there were still very prominent Senators in the South who represented large African American populations.

So we sat there and looked at this list of people who were going to be voting on this nomination. People like [Howell] Hal Heflin of Alabama. I can remember sitting with Kennedy and him saying to me specifically, "Listen, you have to talk to Richard Arrington, the mayor of Birmingham, and we've got to talk to all types of people in terms of how we can affect other members about how they're going to vote. They're not going to be clear on how to vote unless they hear from their constituencies." That was the beginning of opposing the Bork nomination.

The vote on Bork happened in the fall. Most Senators, when they're in their August recess periods, either take vacation or they're off, because it's August. But during that recess, Ted Kennedy was at his home in Massachusetts in Hyannis Port, on the phone, calling civil rights leaders and talking about why it was important to oppose this nomination and how their Senators had to hear from them in order to do the right thing. That's how he spent his August recess, on the phone talking to these folks. So I put together a list of people we needed to call, and between

Jeff and Carolyn and me we had the right talking points and we knew how to push all the right buttons. And it worked, because of his tireless efforts. He spent his August recess on the phone with the civil rights community: Coretta Scott King, John Lewis, Richard Arrington, and on through the list of all the folks who were involved.

Knott: There was some criticism after the fact of the way the Bork nomination was handled. The term "Borked" became part of the lexicon, to indicate that somehow there was something unfair done to Robert Bork. What would you say to that?

Frazier: Yes, I've heard that whole thing about this new word "Borked." I don't subscribe to that philosophy, quite frankly. I think Judge Bork had the ability to fight back and he did fight back. Let's face it, he had behind him the greatest bully pulpit in American politics, which is the White House. A very popular President nominated him. I feel that Robert Bork was not in any real way set up. I think what set Robert Bork up were his writings and his rulings from the bench years prior. I think that if Robert Bork had shown any real fairness through his judicial career, he would have fared differently. I find it very hard to sympathize with him simply because he set himself up in a real sense, so I don't really buy into that whole lexicon of being Borked. Use that term if you want to, but you don't find many Democrats who are going to use that term. That's probably a more Republican term.

Knott: Without a doubt. What about Clarence Thomas? Did you play a role in that hearing?

Frazier: Yes. That was a real tough time for us in the office, particularly because as you remember, the Senator was coming through his own personal difficulties at that time. For him to be the lion on the issue that he'd been in past issues like apartheid or like Bork or some of the other issues that we worked on was hard because we were not at our best. While I think he would have liked to have played a greater role in that whole piece, because of what he was coming through personally, it was hard for him to be the voice that the American public was used to.

Additionally, we saw that there were conservative African Americans who were very supportive of Clarence Thomas. We went through the accusations of the "lynching of Clarence Thomas—"

Knott: "High-tech lynching."

Frazier: Exactly. None of us bought into that. We were trying to help provide whatever ammunition we could toward opposing his nomination, but I feel to a certain degree our voice was taken out of that one.

Knott: This was a decision on the Senator's part, that because of his current circumstances he just could not take the lead on the Thomas thing? Is that what you're saying?

Frazier: Well, he did speak out against the nomination, but he didn't play the role that he normally played on issues like this. If you go back and look at the legislation through the decade of the '80s going into the early '90s, on issues like apartheid, Bork, the King Holiday, he was very much a leader. He was recognized on the floor of the Senate as a leader on all of these issues. On this one it was harder to be a leader because again of what he was coming through personally. So while he spoke out against it, he wasn't the recognized person that the groups of

folks who normally were in opposition to these things would go to for leadership and counsel on how best to affect the process.

That's not to say that he would not have liked to have played that role, but I think it was a tougher thing for him to do, and I don't think he wanted to give ammunition to pro-Thomas supporters to say, "This is what's wrong with the United States Senate and this is what's wrong with the Judiciary Committee. You've got these older white men who live a very different lifestyle from this particular person who came up through the judicial process, and here they are leading a charge against him." I think he would have been more comfortable again had he not been just recently coming out of the personal process. He wasn't going to be a target for that because I think that it would not have been credible. I know years later as we look back on this it's clearly a fight that we're sorry that we lost.

In fact, I think Bork leading into Thomas was the beginning of the judicial nomination process as we know it. Starting with Bork, you really started to see more of the ability to coach nominees to give evasive answers and to not really talk about what they stand for. It started with Bork but it didn't succeed. But it started to succeed with judicial nominations post-Bork. They used Bork as the example of what not to do in a nomination process. Don't talk about what you really stand for even if your writings are out there. Be as evasive as possible. I think that was the beginning of a new process that has gotten us to the two latest Supreme Court Justices being confirmed without the fanfare or the scrutiny they deserved. Thomas was probably example number two of that. Started with Bork, went to Thomas.

Gregg D. Lindskog: I know this is counterfactual, but you've mentioned how the civil rights groups were at least ambivalent about Thomas initially, not sure, there was debate, and it's been suggested that this is really where Thomas got nominated, during this delay in building up opposition and allowing the White House and Senator [John] Danforth to present Thomas in a certain light. Do you believe Senator Kennedy could have played a role in by galvanizing them in the same way? Or would Clarence Thomas always have been a difficult nominee?

Frazier: I think he would have been difficult under any circumstances. The comfort level despite Thomas's very public views and writings is very different for civil rights groups to galvanize around or attack. And it's strange because it shouldn't be. But it's harder to do that around a nominee of color than it is around a Caucasian nominee who has a history of being anti-civil rights. The contrast or the parallel—and I didn't do this nomination I'm about to bring up, is the Thurgood Marshall nomination in the '60s as the first African American on the Supreme Court. That is a universe apart from the Thomas nomination, but it was easy for the African American groups to galvanize around the Marshall nomination and support it, not only because he was African American, but for all the work he had done on behalf of civil rights causes as an attorney for the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People]. It was very different in the early 1990s with Clarence Thomas, who is an African American, but not an African American that the civil rights groups could relate to, not an African American that they could galvanize behind, and in fact an African American who they were somewhat fearful of because he was completely the other way in his thinking in terms of affirmative action.

The short answer to your question is that I think Kennedy would have liked to lead the fight against Thomas. It's a lot harder though, when you're doing it against a person of color, and

particularly a person of color who was not a person of privilege growing up in his life and getting to where he got. Also I think it would have been a very different situation had he not come through this personal difficulty.

Lindskog: But you didn't see any hesitancy in terms of Senator Kennedy or Kennedy staff. Was this ambivalence also within your staff about Thomas, that if we defeat this President [George H. W.] Bush might nominate someone as conservative, only Caucasian, or something to that effect? Was it just the situation that you were in?

Frazier: I'd say it was both. The staff was adamantly opposed to Thomas and what he would mean to the Court. The other fear was that if Thomas were to succeed and be on the Court, he would be the "African American justice" on the Court for many, many years to come. Clarence Thomas was young when he got nominated to the Supreme Court. The likelihood of getting another African American on the Court was probably not great. There was a need to put another woman on the Court. There was a need to look at Hispanic candidates for the Court. The fears were that Thomas was anathema to all of us in terms of what he thought, and secondly that we weren't going to get another African American on the Court.

We were all opposed, it was how far could we go and put the Senator out there, and have him make statements to the point where the process wasn't credible. When I say process wasn't credible, I mean the process as it relates to the Democrats on the committee wasn't credible. If there were future Court appointees that we had to deal with, how credible would we be in the process if we went way out there on Thomas, and in fact we became the target of the process itself? And that's not something we wanted to face, because we knew there were going to be further nominations we were going to have to deal with. We figured the Senator was going to be on the Judiciary Committee as long as he wanted to be, and he was going to be a part of the process as long as he wanted to be. He had to remain credible. Even if we had to lose the Thomas fight, which we didn't want to do, we still have to remain credible to the process. And so you have to be really careful in terms of how far you're going to put him out there in order to keep him credible.

I think that people understood that, and I think a certain group of people understood. Now, there are others who were allies of ours who didn't understand that, who didn't understand that. Politicians are very good in my view of having some idea of how much credibility they have or how much goodwill they have with the American people or the people who elect them, whether it's on a national basis or on a statewide basis. Kennedy's credibility in terms of Massachusetts—the well is vast; I think we know that. Kennedy is uniquely not just a Senator from Massachusetts, he is perceived by many as a Senator for everybody, whether it's civil rights, or health care, take your pick. He is one person who is viewed as a national Senator.

I can't tell you how many times I heard that while I worked for Kennedy. No matter where you were from, particularly people of color, black or Hispanic, say, "Yes, we know he represents Massachusetts, but he's our Senator too." That was really true of people who lived in the states where there may have been two Republican Senators, who they felt weren't looking out for them necessarily but were looking out for other constituencies. They would always come to our office and say, "You know what? He represents Massachusetts, but he's my Senator too, he speaks for me, I know he's looking out for me, I'm not going to get that from my Senators. My Senators are

someplace else completely." I think at the end of the day, you have to remain credible in the process, and you have to know how far to go in this process in order to remain credible. Wherever we are, the unfortunate thing is that I think through Bork and Thomas the whole process has changed.

Knott: To switch gears a bit here, you've mentioned South Africa and apartheid a few times. Did you ever travel to South Africa?

Frazier: Yes.

Knott: You did.

Frazier: I've been in South Africa a number of times. My first trip to South Africa while I was working for the Senator was in 1988. I went over with another staff person, who I hope you'll also have the opportunity to talk to, Nancy Soderberg. Is she on your list?

Knott: She's on our list.

Frazier: Yes, Nancy and I went to South Africa the first time and talked to both a number of people who were very prominent in the ANC, the African National Congress, and talked to them about the movement and how well it was going or how well it wasn't going depending on your point of view. We also talked to a number of South African government officials about apartheid and about how blacks were treated in South Africa at that time. Subsequently, I've gone back three or four times. I had the good fortune of going to Nelson Mandela's inaugural. I had the good fortune of being included as part of President Clinton's trip in 1998, because by that time I was a Clinton political appointee, so I got to go for the dedication of the Ronald H. Brown Commercial Center in Johannesburg, South Africa. The President went with Secretary Brown's widow to cut the ribbon, naming that commercial center after Secretary Brown. So I got to go while apartheid was in effect and post apartheid.

Knott: Right. Was the release of Nelson Mandela on Senator Kennedy's agenda? Was this a matter of importance to him?

Frazier: Hugely. It was one of the driving factors behind Kennedy's lead in the fight for sanctions against South Africa. Obviously, it was a larger cause than just the release of Nelson Mandela, but probably that was the second issue for Kennedy. The first issue was getting rid of apartheid. That was clearly the big struggle, the big fight for him. You have Kennedy on the Democratic side and a Republican, Lowell Weicker, a Senator from Connecticut. Those two were just perfect together in leading this fight. Lowell Weicker was very courageous leading that fight against his own party and against his President. The Democrats supported sanctions against South Africa while the Republicans believed in Reagan's idea of constructive engagement. That was their whole piece. Reagan was not looking to impose sanctions, for a number of reasons, a lot of which were related to business. Kennedy took a very famous trip to South Africa. Did anybody talk to you about this?

Knott: Yes, we've actually interviewed Bishop [Desmond] Tutu.

Frazier: Oh, you did. Then he can tell you far more than I can. The Senator took a very famous trip to South Africa in 1985, before I came on board. I came on board in July of '85. I think Kennedy went to South Africa maybe in—

Knott: We have it as January '85.

Frazier: January '85? I was going to say December of '84, but was it January of '85?

Knott: This is what we have in our briefing materials.

Frazier: That's probably right. In South Africa he did a number of things there, including the time with Tutu and all that. Then I came on board and we dove right into the issue. I believe it was when Kennedy came back from South Africa that he and Lowell Weicker brought legislation in the Senate calling for an end of apartheid, but also at the same time calling for sanctions against South Africa.

It was a struggle to say the least. The votes just weren't there at the time. Reagan was threatening a veto of any sanctions bill that came to the White House. He had a very active Congressional Black Caucus, in the House. At that time, the prominent members were Bill Gray from Pennsylvania, Mickey Leland from Texas, and Ron Dellums from California. Ron Dellums was amazing. There was also a Senator from Illinois, Paul Simon, who wanted to work hand-in-hand with Ted Kennedy on this issue. Paul Simon was then the chair of the African Subcommittee in the Senate, Foreign Relations. It was a struggle, to say the least.

We did all that we could to work with the ANC here in the States, like working with the Congressional Black Caucus to help put together the right political leadership to get the bill passed in the House. We figured that the best way for us to be able to move forward on this was getting the House to go first, passing an antiapartheid bill, giving it to the Senate, which would put pressure on the Senate to do so, and then we would have to deal with how we got the Senate to where we wanted it to be. Believe it or not, we got there. It was a tough time, putting together the coalition. Paul Simon worked with a Senator from Kansas, Nancy Kassebaum. Time and time again things were happening in South Africa that were just giving us ammunition to make our arguments even greater. Reverend [Jesse] Jackson was part of the process along with a whole long number of people, and it just grew and grew and grew.

I have to tell you the day that the Senate passed the bill, it had already passed in the House, I was so proud. It was amazing. The day the bill actually became law, Senator Kennedy had somebody go and pick up a fabulous bottle of champagne, and he and I got into the car and drove over to this little office right off of Capitol Hill. It was the headquarters for TransAfrica. I don't know how much you know about TransAfrica, but it was headed at that time by Randall Robinson, who I also hope you can interview at some point.

Randall Robinson was paramount in helping over the years. That day we went over there and we walked through that door and we saw the TransAfrica staff and we saw Randall. Almost everybody had tears in their eyes. I'll never forget the Senator opening that bottle of champagne and just pouring into everybody's glass and making some really terrific remarks and leading a toast that finally sanctions were imposed against the government of South Africa, which to us was the beginning of the end of apartheid.

It wasn't long after, as you know, that the agreement came about and South Africa was free. Later of course there was [Nelson] Mandela, being released and coming to the United States. There was a national committee that was put together to organize the Mandela trip including Kennedy, Harry Belafonte, and Roger Wilkins. Kennedy was one of the national cochairs. So we when we were starting to put together the schedule of where we wanted to go, as you know, it was New York, Boston, and a number of cities. Kennedy was the chair of all the events that happened in Boston.

Knott: They had an event at the Kennedy Library.

Frazier: We had an event at Kennedy Library, which I was responsible for putting together. It was absolutely fabulous. I had Nelson and Winnie Mandela sitting at a table with Mrs. [Jacqueline] Onassis, the Senator, Ethel Kennedy, and Stevie Wonder. Stevie Wonder performed for Nelson Mandela that day in Boston at the Kennedy Library. We had Danny Glover, who had played Nelson Mandela in a movie about Nelson Mandela's life. It was just a fabulous event that took place in the atrium of the Kennedy Library. Mandela's day in Boston was absolutely magnificent. In fact the largest crowd event of the entire tour was in Boston at the Hatch Shell, at the—are you familiar with Boston at all?

Knott: I am, I am. The Esplanade?

Frazier: The Esplanade right there on the Charles River. The Boston Police estimated the crowd to be somewhere between 250,000 to 300,000 people. Nelson Mandela was up on the stage in the Shell doing a South African dance about his freedom and being in the United States. It was absolutely magnificent and a great time. A very proud achievement.

Knott: I was going to say, was this whole experience dealing with South Africa, getting the sanctions through, enjoying the Mandela visit, is this the proudest memory that you have of your time with Senator Kennedy?

Frazier: Yes, I'd say that was the proudest moment. There were many moments where I was very proud of working for him, but that was probably the proudest moment. That was my crowning achievement I think, working with the Senator as it relates to legislation. There are victories that you can have that are purely political victories, and then there are victories you can have that are public, political and legislative. The fact that we were able to enact that law was my proudest achievement legislatively.

There were other things that he did that I was so proud of. I can't tell you what it's like to be an African American and to have been in that office in the time period when I was there and to represent so much to so many, whether it was a judicial nomination or South Africa or it was the King Holiday or take your pick. It was just a great time to be there. The other thing about Ted Kennedy, which I think is really interesting, is I after I left Kennedy's office I went to be chief of staff for Carol Moseley Braun, the first African American woman elected Senator in United States history. I only did it for a year before I went into the administration. And then President Clinton was kind enough to nominate me to be Assistant Secretary of Transportation. So I had a lot of great working experience.

I tell people whenever I talk to them when they ask, "Of all the things you've done, what do you see as the best time period of your years in Washington?" that the seven years I worked in the Senator's office was in my view the best professional experience that I could have ever gotten. Then they say, "Well, wow, that's interesting. You worked for Clinton, you worked for Moseley Braun, you worked for Ron Brown, why is that?" and I say the thing about Kennedy that I've always appreciated is that when he was instructing you to do something for him and he would tell you how he wanted it done, he wouldn't simply give you the instruction, but he'd tell you why. He would tell you what it is that he's seeking to accomplish as he was going along to get this done.

What it taught me professionally was not only to see the goal but how best to accomplish the goal. Interestingly, as I look at Senator Kennedy's career, I've always thought that Kennedy was more accomplished when there was a Republican in the White House or the Senate was Republican majority. He was able to get more done in those time frames than when there was a Democratic Congress or Democratic President. It's amazing how good he is at being able to see the goal and following the right processes to get to that goal. That taught me that the best way to achieve your goal is to think about how to get there and the art of compromise.

The people who truly achieve in this town are the people who have the ability to compromise. When I look at his accomplishments in legislation, it's all been about the give-and-take for the greater good. That's the thing I really learned from my seven years of working for Kennedy: learn the process, learn how to get there, don't be completely partisan, and look at the greater good. That's been the professional standard for me ever since.

Knott: Yes, we've heard some criticism of him on precisely those grounds, that perhaps he's too quick to cut a deal with the other side, folks on the other side of the aisle. There's even some of that criticism coming from some fellow Democrats supposedly in the last year or so. You care to comment on that? And did you ever hear that, perhaps from any civil rights groups, "Geez, he's too willing to cut a deal, he's not going all the way for us"?

Frazier: Well, I have to say that in terms of the time that I worked for him, even post the time I worked for him, I don't know that I've ever heard that he's too quick to cut a deal. You always find people who want more. If you see yourself on the precipice of victory you sit back and you think, "OK, I'm there. What more can I get from this? What am I not getting that I could possibly be getting here now?" So I think you always hear that about the ability to get more. I didn't hear that so much about him in terms of his negotiating around King, around apartheid, or around Bork. I didn't really hear that at all. What I've heard lately more so is what I've read. I've heard that most around "No Child Left Behind." I've not seen him take the amount of criticism from his fellow Democrats on anything else as much as I've heard him take it on that.

Is it fair? I don't know. I really don't know. I don't know enough to know the ins and outs of the negotiation of that legislation because I was gone by then. I do hear a lot of my fellow Democrats say Kennedy was promised by [George W.] Bush that he would fund it at full levels, but my understanding is that hasn't happened since the bill's been enacted. In fact, I hear that on a yearly basis the funding has been falling short by $5 billion a year or more, which makes the act that much harder to enforce. I suspect that there's a lot of criticism out there about that, but I don't know enough about it to know.

While I was there I didn't hear that much criticism. I always felt that the groups thought they got as much as they could get and as much as they were going to get. One issue, which was part of the King Holiday bill, was the establishment of the King Holiday Commission. The reason why there was a commission even after the bill was signed into law was that if you remember, even though it became a federal holiday, not all of the states recognized the King Holiday. There were a number of states that were very slow to recognize it. The King Holiday Commission in Congress was to be funded every year to continue to talk about the dream of Dr. King and how to make it a federal holiday—or recognized in every state. There was a struggle every year to get that funding. When the actual King Holiday Commission legislation ran out, we got it reauthorized, because not every state had at that time still taken the holiday.

We suffered some criticism for not getting the amount of funding they would have liked. I remember some tough negotiations between Mrs. [Coretta Scott] King and the Senator about getting the funding. But what I also knew in the back of my mind was what she had told me about how she still appreciated the Senator taking the lead on this fight, because she knew without him it wasn't possible.

I remember that the fight was really, really heavy on the floor of the United States Senate, and that the person who was leading the opposition to reauthorizing the King Holiday Commission was Jesse Helms. When the debate was going on on the Senate floor, the Senate recessed. I said to the Senator, "I'm going to leave the floor and go back to the office. I need to get something." I went back to the office to my desk to get something before the Senate went back in session and my phone rang. My phone rang and my assistant answered the phone and she said, "Can you hold on for a moment?" She walked over to me and she said, "Mike, somebody on the phone says it's Senator Helms and he's calling you." I said, "Oh, Joanne, come on. Why is Senator Helms calling me?" She said, "I don't know, but he said on the phone it's Senator Helms."

So I picked up the phone and I said, "Hello. This is Mike Frazier." The man said, "This is the Mike Frazier that works for Senator Kennedy, right?" I said, "Yes, it is." He said, "This is Senator Helms." I said, "Oh, Senator, how can I help you?" Now he'd just seen me on the floor with Kennedy, so he figured that I was the person staffing this particular legislation. I still didn't believe it was him until he actually identified himself on the phone as Senator Helms. He said, "Now if I understand correctly, this legislation is supposed to go for this long, this many years, and it's supposed to be funded at this level each and every year. Is that correct?" I said, "Yes, Senator, that is correct. It's going to go for this long, it's for this much, and hopefully after that it's run its course and is no longer needed. I'm not going to tell you that's absolutely the case, but for right now that's the case." Then he said, "OK, thank you very much." and he hung up the phone. Now, I'm watching the Senate floor on television in the office. I see a Senator raise his hand and the Chair recognizes the Senator and says, "Senator Helms has the floor." Helms stands up and he says, "I've just talked to somebody I needed to talk to. I'm lifting my objection to this legislation. Let the bill move forward." And that was the end of that.

It's that kind of stuff that you see every day in the Senate when you're working there. The entire time that I was in the Senate, I never saw Kennedy and Helms interact with each other. Never. Never.

Knott: Which was unusual; he interacted with everybody else except Senator Helms.

Frazier: Yes, except Senator Helms. He's the only Senator I've ever seen where there was no interaction. Now, I was not always in their presence when they were around each other, but I had never seen Helms address Kennedy and vice versa. Look at the fact that Kennedy was still on the floor that day and you see my whole point here. Helms could have walked over to Kennedy and asked the same question, but he wouldn't do that. He calls the staff person for Kennedy to ask the question to get the answer. He wouldn't go to Kennedy. He was still on the floor himself. He wouldn't go to Kennedy even with the Senate in recess to ask that question. Strange but true.

So to answer your question, yes, I'm sure that there are criticisms, but people are not going to necessarily come to me because they know I work for him. And they're not going to be completely straightforward with me. I think that Kennedy just understands the outcome of this stuff better than most people do and that's through a lot of listening and learning, and a lot of failed attempts to accomplish things in the Senate. I don't know all of the recent Kennedy legislation to really address that. The only thing I really have paid a great deal of attention to as of late is "No Child Left Behind," and it'll be interesting because as you know, both of you know, "No Child Left Behind" is up for reauthorization. So the question becomes what's going to be the measuring stick for this one, because I don't know that it's going to get reauthorized, to tell you the truth. Quite frankly, as you probably know, there are a lot of Republicans who are opposed to its reauthorization. The President in my view is so wounded that I don't know how many votes he can bring to it in either the House or the Senate for that matter.

Knott: Could you talk a little more about some of your other foreign trips? We noticed, at least we have in our records that you traveled to Berlin, Geneva, and Brussels in November of 1989 with the Senator. Is that correct? Do we have that right?

Frazier: Yes, let me see, I was in Geneva and Brussels. Geneva might have been a stop on the way to Berlin, and Brussels might have been a stop on the way back. I'm not really sure. Yes, actually it was interesting. The Senator and I and Nancy Soderberg went to the Berlin Wall three weeks after the Wall started coming down. Somebody had an absolutely terrific idea that the Senator go back to the Berlin Wall and give a speech like his brother had done in 19—

Knott: Sixty-three, I think.

Frazier: Was it '63?

Knott: Think so, yes.

Frazier: With "Ich bin ein Berliner."

Knott: Yes.

Frazier: Yes, so this was a reenactment so to speak of that trip and it was quickly and hastily arranged, mostly by Nancy. I went over for the purpose of just setting it all up. I went over and did the back-and-forth along with our embassy to hash out the details of actually being able to give the speech at the Wall with the mayor of Berlin right there in front of Brandenburg Gate. It was a great trip. They did a great job of publicizing it and thousands of Germans turned out for the speech. The Senator basically talked about the freedom of the German people and how it was

important and how happy he was to be back—well, that would have been what, 20 something years after. It was ’89 when we went, right?

Knott: Be about 26 years or so.

Frazier: Yes, something like that. How happy he was to be back so many years after his brother gave the initial speech about the freedom of the German people and how proud he was that the German people over that period of time had persevered and finally they were recognizing and seeing freedom. It was a great time for not only the German people but for the Americans as well because they were a partner of Germany and had always felt that freedom was a very strong thing for them..

Another trip that I had done with him was a trip to the Middle East. And we went to Israel, Jordan—

Knott: Egypt?

Frazier: And Egypt, yes.

Knott: Got it as December 1986.

Frazier: Yes, I think that’s right. Another great trip. On that trip we went under the auspices of the Armed Services Committee, of which the Senator is a member, as you know. That’s really what the whole trip was about: to see and talk about negotiations as they related to ongoing peace negotiations in that part of the world. Also, I think the Senator was making sure that the Israelis in particular had what they needed to defend themselves. I’ll never forget going to King Hussein’s palace in Amman, Jordan, which was just fabulous. One of his aides gave me a *kaffiyeh*, which I didn’t know how to put on and he showed me.

One of the things I remember specifically about when we were leaving Israel was a motorcade to the Israeli-Jordanian border. We drove by the Red Sea and that was fabulous. At the border, we got out, we walked across this footbridge and saw gun mounts on one side and gun mounts on the other side. You can’t help but be a little nervous with this type of thing, because in everyday life you’re not used to that. We walked across the bridge into Jordanian territory and we got into another group of cars. We drove down a road about a mile and all of a sudden we pulled up and saw these two magnificent helicopters—royal Jordanian helicopters sent by the King. We got into the helicopters and we flew for maybe, I don’t know, a half an hour, 45 minutes, and then the helicopters set down. A party of people met us and we got on horses and rode horseback for a while.

Then all of a sudden we come into a place where there are walls on both sides of us. And it’s the lost city of Petra. We got this fabulous tour. It’s literally a canyon with cliffs going up as high as you can imagine on both sides. And in the cliffs were dwellings of people who lived there in supposedly biblical times. It was absolutely amazing. I don’t know if either of you are movie buffs, but if you saw the last Indiana Jones movie.

Lindskog: *Last Crusade*? I think it is.

Frazier: Was it *Last Crusade* where they were going for the Holy Grail?

Lindskog: Yes.

Frazier: Well, the scene where they're actually at the Holy Grail was filmed in Petra. As you see them going through the different caves, that was filmed in Petra in Jordan.

The entire trip was great all the way around. Including all the meetings with government officials to Senator Kennedy taking a walk in a park in the middle of Jerusalem. This is funny. We're driving down the street and the Senator says, "You know, I need some exercise. Let's just stop." Stop? We're going to stop in the middle of Jerusalem? So the Israeli security, a group called Shin Bet, doesn't know what to do but the Senator said, "I want to stop, I want to walk." The motorcade stops and the Senator gets out. He decides he's going to take a little walk through the park. He's just walking through the park. Well, you can imagine the citizens of Israel who were just sitting in the park, pretty soon were saying, "Wait a minute. Is that—that's Senator Kennedy!" And next thing you know crowds of people were coming over and saying, "Senator Kennedy, hello! Welcome to our country! What are you doing here?" It was just great. But that's just the kind of person he is. "Oh, I'm just here. I need some exercise. I've been in a car or on a plane for the last five or six days. I just want to get some exercise."

And this reminds me—I'm going to digress here for just a second if you don't mind. This is a story I tell a lot of my friends about Senator Kennedy. Actually there are two stories, but let me do them both very quickly. The Senator was invited to Atlanta for a civil rights award one night. We decided to go to Atlanta to accept the award. The Senator and I both fly down there. Now, the Atlanta Hartsfield is a phenomenally large airport. It's got those people movers. So when we flew in on commercial, Mayor Young had cars come out to the tarmac to pick us up off the plane and bring us into the city.

We went to the awards dinner that night. He got the award. We spent the night. And then we got up the next morning to fly back to Washington. So the police cars and the regular car were there again. As we get out to Hartsfield the Senator says, "Instead of going on the tarmac, I just want to go through the airport." I looked at him and said, "Senator, that's a pretty big airport. It's a lot of walking." He said, "Yes, but I want the exercise, I want to walk." So I said OK. We pulled up to the front of the airport and we go through security. Then we walk a bit and we get on a people mover. Now we're sitting there on the people mover. There are two plainclothes detectives, the Senator, and I. Soon, people start to notice, and are like "No, no."

There's a guy sitting there with his wife. He's got a newspaper up in front of his face and he's reading the newspaper. His wife's sitting there next to him and she says, "Honey, you're not going to believe this, but Ted Kennedy's sitting across from us." He doesn't say anything but keeps reading the paper. The again, she goes "Honey, listen to me, I'm telling you, that's Ted Kennedy across from us." He still doesn't look away from the paper and then finally she really gives him one in the ribs and she says, "Honey, I'm telling you, that's—" He's sitting there reading the newspaper and he says, "Why would Ted Kennedy be on the people mover with us going to catch our plane?"

Now, there are people all around who can hear this conversation. The Senator is right across the way. He is just cracking up laughing because he hears this husband and wife. The husband doesn't believe the wife. So he never puts the paper down to see whether it's Kennedy sitting across from him. And the Senator's just laughing and roaring. The people mover comes to a stop. The husband and wife stand up and he's putting his paper down and that's when the Senator taps him on the shoulder and says, "Hi, how are you?" The look on the guy's face is like he can't get over the fact that his wife a) was telling him the truth, b) he should have listened to her, and c) what's Ted Kennedy doing on a people mover? That's a great story. It's funny to see him out in the American public when you least expect it, you know what I mean?

I'll tell you really quickly. We're up in New York City. I can't even remember why we were there. We were supposed to go to a speech. There was bad weather and the speech got canceled. We're downtown in Macy's or somewhere in New York City. We're in there and he remembers it's his son Teddy [Kennedy] Junior's birthday. And he says, "Hey, let's stop here for a second, and I want to get something for Teddy." He's looking around and he sees some shirts. He takes the shirts, a whole group of them, up to the counter. And he's doing one of these, patting his pockets like he's—

Knott: Reaching for his wallet.

Frazier: Right! No wallet. He says, "Well, I guess I forgot my wallet." The lady is there at the counter and she's saying, "Senator, can I help you?" He said, "Oh, I forgot my wallet. OK, well, just—I'll put these back." He starts to pick up the shirts and the lady says, "No, no, wait a minute. We know who you are. We can track your account and charge it to your account if you like." And he looked at her and said, "Are you sure?" She said, "Oh, yes, we know you can pay for it and we know who you are. Let us get the account and we'll just put it on the account." Sure enough, she went through the process, tracked down his card number, put it on the account. They put the shirts in the bag and he walked out with the bag. I was pretty fortunate to have a number of those light moments with him.

Also, he's a fun guy and a good person to be around. He really is a fun person to be around. I know that's not why you're here talking to me about the light moments, but there are some times with him when you're proud, and there are just times when you just want to laugh, because he's such a character.

What other foreign trips do you have? Does it say?

Knott: Well, see, we weren't sure you were on all of these. But these were trips that he took during the time that you were there. March of '85 to Geneva for a UN [United Nations] conference on famine.

Frazier: No, I didn't go to that.

Knott: January '86 to Peru, Uruguay, Brazil, Argentina.

Frazier: No.

Knott: Also in ’86 a trip to the USSR [Union of Soviet Socialist Republics]. You mentioned the Middle Eastern trip, which we have here. May of ’87 Poland and Italy.

Frazier: No, I didn’t go to that one either.

Knott: December ’87 the Persian Gulf and Geneva. April ’89 to Mexico. March ’90 to Chile and also to the USSR.

Frazier: No, I didn’t do any of those.

Knott: Did you ever travel back to Massachusetts with him?

Frazier: Oh, yes. In fact I’d go back to Massachusetts—

Knott: Is that your home state?

Frazier: No, Pennsylvania’s my home state but I would do a number of things in Massachusetts. Primarily I was very much involved in working with the black and Hispanic community. There would be a number of times when we would go back and do events primarily in Boston, sometimes in Roxbury and sometimes in Mattapan. It really depended on the event. I did a number of things with him in Boston and got to know the African American community pretty well there. In fact, to the point now where a lot of those folks are still friends. I can still call them friends and if I have the occasion to go to Boston for something will often call on them. For example, two years ago when I went back to Boston for the Democratic Convention, I called a lot of my friends who are still there and fairly prominent in the community. I don’t know if you have any names of folks that they gave you for Massachusetts. But Ambassador Charles Stith, is he on your list at all?

Knott: I’m familiar with his name. I’m not sure he’s on our list but—

Frazier: He’s very prominent and a good person for you to talk to. He was Clinton’s ambassador to Tanzania.

Knott: I didn’t know that.

Frazier: Yes, and a very prominent minister in the community up there. He gave up his church and then Clinton made him ambassador to Tanzania. He’s still in Boston. There’s Liz Walker, an anchorwoman in Boston, WBZ. But anyhow, yes, to answer your question, I did a number of things with him in Boston. Usually it was a community event around an issue, like health care. It could be around any number of issues. Most of what I did in Boston with him were events on civil rights issues. A few times it was to get an award for something that he had done, or for his career in civil rights mainly.

I’ll tell you, there was one event I did with him in Boston, which was an absolutely fabulous event. This was right after Magic Johnson had announced that he had AIDS [Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome]. I’m trying to think what year that was. What year did he retire from the Lakers the first time?

Lindskog: I was going to say that would have to be in either the very early ’90s or probably late ’80s it would have to—early ’90s.

Knott: Well, then it’s H. W. Bush, if that’s—

Frazier: H. W. All right, so H. W. Bush puts together the National Council on AIDS and appoints [Earvin] Magic Johnson to the Council. Magic Johnson had reached out to Kennedy to talk to him about the AIDS Council and said that he would like to work with him in any way that he possibly could. Kennedy said, “I’ll tell you what I’d really like to do. I’d like you to help me help educate black kids on the AIDS epidemic and how we need to fight this disease.” If you looked at the numbers the incidences in the minority communities were much higher than they were in Caucasian communities. Johnson said, “I’ll do whatever you want.” Kennedy picked up the phone and called [Arnold Jacob] Red Auerbach and asked Red if he would talk to Larry Bird about Kennedy and Magic and Bird going to a high school in the heart of black Boston to talk about the AIDS epidemic. Within two weeks, we were in Boston. We put together an event in Boston at—I wish I could tell you the high school. We had a full assembly. It was probably close to 1,500 or 2,000 kids. It was a big school. And onto the stage here comes Ted Kennedy, Magic Johnson, and Larry Bird. It was an absolutely phenomenal event.

It really touched a lot of people because Bird was so well known in the community. He was Mr. Basketball in Boston. And it touched a lot of people because Bird introduced Johnson. And when he talked about Magic Johnson, he talked about the love and the respect he had for Magic Johnson. He talked about how their careers had been intertwined even from college. If you remember, the championship game in the NCAA [National Collegiate Athletic Association] was Michigan State versus Indiana State, and they both went in that draft to the pros. Then through the years they played against each other. Lakers versus Celtics, that was always the big rivalry.

Bird talked about Johnson as a great basketball player, but also as a humanitarian and a person that he loved and respected. And then Magic spoke and talked. I can’t even tell you how the community just galvanized around that whole event. Kennedy deservedly got a lot of credit for taking that to the community, and talking about the importance of your sexual habits and your practice. I’ll never forget that event. Have you been by the Kennedy office lately?

Knott: Yes.

Frazier: Is there still a basketball in the reception area?

Knott: Oh, boy, you got me.

Frazier: Kennedy had three balls signed by both Larry Bird and Magic Johnson.

That day that Mandela was in Boston was just pure magic. I can’t even begin to tell you the effect that that had. The beauty of Mandela’s car pulling up to the front of the JFK [John Fitzgerald Kennedy] Library and there stood Senator Kennedy, Mrs. Onassis, Mrs. Ethel Kennedy, and Nelson and Winnie Mandela getting out and greeting them. It was all very powerful with Mandela talking about being in prison and remembering President Kennedy. Because he actually went into prison I think in ’62.

Knott: That's right, yes.

Frazier: And there were some things in the press in the United States about when he went into prison and about him being in prison and learning that President Kennedy had been killed, and talking about what Kennedy represented in terms of freedom to the free world. Then the whole thing about Winnie Mandela talking to the Senator while he was in South Africa and Kennedy's speech more than once on the U.S. Senate floor talking about here was a man who while in prison over a 27- or 28-year period, over 28 years, never ever ever got to touch even the hands of his children, and I think only touched the hand of Winnie Mandela, over a 28-year period, once, in his entire time while he was in prison at Robben Island off the coast of South Africa.

The whole thing was just so moving. To have Nelson Mandela coming to the Presidential Library and the Senator doing the tour and showing him what this was in President Kennedy's life and what that was in President Kennedy's life, and to have Mrs. Onassis right there with him was just—I can't even put into words what that was. Then having a fabulous lunch and having Stevie Wonder go to the keyboard and perform in honor of Nelson Mandela was magic. And then for him to proceed down to the Esplanade to give his speech, and then dance in front of 250,000, 300,000 people.

As the crowd came through the gates for the event, they were handed ANC flags. So everybody had flags in hand, and they were waving as Mandela was speaking. And it was magic.

Knott: Why did you leave to join the—how did that come about? You left the Senator to join Senator Braun, and then you went into the administration. Is that correct?

Frazier: That's correct. I don't know if anybody has talked to you about the Fund for a Democratic Majority. It's the Senator's PAC [political action committee], which he's had for years, in which he raises money to give to other Senators who are running. At different times we would go through the list. This was early '92—actually late '91, early '92 and we were thinking, *OK, do we have a chance of winning this race, yes, we do, how much money are they down, well, we need to do X, Y and Z.* We would talk about PAC contributions and clearly we were watching the race in Illinois, because as you remember, '92 was the Year of the Woman after the whole Clarence Thomas thing. You had a whole bunch of women who ran for the Senate in '92, not all of whom were elected, but a number of whom were elected. I think Dianne Feinstein came that year, Patty Murray came that year, and Carol came that year. There were a number of interactions that the Senator had with Carol Moseley Braun as a candidate, and whenever those interactions took place, I was always the person who was staffing that meeting, whether it was here or there. We went to Illinois to campaign for her.

So she had met me and when she got elected one of the things that occurred to her was that she'd like to have an African American chief of staff. She asked the Senator his views of people, and he said, "Well, you ought to take a look at Mike." I and a number of other people interviewed for her and I was fortunate enough to be chosen. There was me and one other person who was African American who was a chief of staff for a Senator. And interestingly, that Senator was Arlen Specter from Pennsylvania. You would have thought it would have been a Democrat. It was Arlen Specter. And so I went over to her and it was—I don't even know how to describe it.

It was one of those things where I've done legislation for seven years, and now I'm moving in to be chief of staff for a Senator. Clearly it's what one would view as a step up in life, or up the ladder, so to speak. I'd done legislation for him for seven years, and got to do a lot of fabulous things. So while I was happy to be working for the first African American woman elected Senator in history, it was a sad time for me to be leaving his office. But as the time was coming near for me to go, he'd say to me, "Look, if you ever need to talk, I'm not far away. You know where to find me. You know we can talk. If you've got a problem, come by the office. Or talk to me on the floor. But the really important thing is I want you to go over and get her off the ground so she can get off to a good start. That's the thing that you can really be most helpful with. I'm sorry to lose you, I'm sorry to see you go. But this is a good thing. This is a good thing for the party. This is a good thing for Carol. It's a good thing for you. View it as very positive. And go and enjoy it." And I did.

I'll tell you, though, there were a number of times even when I was working for her that I would still go back and talk to him or see him, and it would be kind of funny. They'd see each other in the hall, he'd be going to the Senate floor for a vote, and she'd say, "Don't you think about trying to steal my chief of staff back. He works for me now. He doesn't work for you now." It was a really nice relationship. And it was a nice segue for me in terms of moving up that ladder and making more money. I only did it for a year, but I'll tell you, that year was a rock star. It was an exciting time with all these women Senators.

Initially, Senator Braun had kept the staff of the Senator who'd been serving before her, who was also a Democrat. I had to go and in the kindest way I could think possible, fire them, hire a new Washington staff, go to Illinois, and hire staff for the three offices in Illinois. It was a year that kept me on my toes. And, as you know, she was not without controversy in her first year in office.

Knott: I remember that.

Frazier: During this time of trying to manage her and expectations and a new staff, Secretary Brown came to me and said, "I met you in a Presidential campaign. We all wanted to work for a Democratic President. You know what? This is your chance. Come and work for a Democratic President." He also said, "You've done the Senate now for eight years. What more can you do? Look, I know you like working for Carol. It's fun to be chief of staff and everything. But come work for a Democratic President. Come down to the Department of Commerce. I could use you for a job here." And that's what I did.

The whole Ron Brown experience is interesting. I don't know if you know the history between the Senator and Ron Brown.

Knott: Somewhat.

Frazier: You know that Ron Brown had been the head of the Washington office for the Urban League. Senator Kennedy's brother-in-law, Steve Smith, was the campaign manager if you remember, for the Senator's Presidential run. Steve Smith met Ron Brown and liked him a lot for a whole variety of reasons. Ron Brown was a class act. He was very well spoken, and he was just

class all the way around. He talked Ron Brown into leaving the Urban League and becoming the deputy campaign manager for the campaign.

Even when the campaign was coming to an end, remember, the Democrats were still in power before November, before the Reagan landslide, and we lost the Senate. But Ron left—after the campaign was over and Kennedy made him staff director for the Senate Judiciary Committee. Ron did that for a short period of time before we lost the Senate. Then he became the Minority Staff Director, but he didn't want to stay that long, and he left not long thereafter.

That was the beginning of the Ron Brown-Ted Kennedy relationship. I started there in January of '94. I did a number of things with Secretary Brown, including a lot of travel. In March of 1996, Ron Brown was going to Memphis, Tennessee, and he said, "I want to do several things while I'm in Memphis. But what do you think I could do that would really be a great standout piece?" I said, "It'd be really great if you went back to the hall where Dr. King gave his last speech, 'I've been to the mountaintop' speech, while you're there." He said, "You know what? That's a great idea." Actually, it wasn't March, it was the end of February. And the reason why was because it was Black History Month and we were going to Memphis to do Black History Month events. So I said, "Why don't you go to the hall and give a speech?" I talked to the churches in Memphis, and they said, "Yes, great, we'll come." He went to—he gave a speech that night at that very same hall, that very same podium, the whole nine yards. While we were there we did a tour of the Civil Rights Museum in Memphis. Have you ever been there?

Knott: I have. I thought it was a fantastic place.

Frazier: If you ever go to Memphis, you have to take this tour, because the absolute last thing of the museum is that you walk out onto the balcony of the Lorraine Hotel to the spot where Dr. King was assassinated. That's the last thing in the museum.

That was in February. Then March we went to Colombia, Panama, and Nicaragua. The Secretary did a trip down there to talk to the Commerce Secretary of each of those countries and met with the Presidents of those countries as well. I was on that trip with him. We flew military aircraft down, and while going to each of the countries we flew military as well. That was the third week of March. Flew military back.

We were home for ten days before he decided to go on this next trip to Eastern Europe. I was slated to go on that trip. I was newly married and my wife said, "You know what? I really wish you'd stay home. I really wish you'd not go on this trip. Stay home." So I said, "OK, I'll stay home." I went to the Secretary and said, "I'm not going to do this trip. I'll see you when you get back." They left, went on the trip, and you all know what happened on the trip. The day of the crash my phone was just ringing off the hook. By the time I got to work, I probably had—and I'm not kidding when I say this. I probably had at least 70 or 80 voicemails. I got to work and I was thinking, *Why in the world do I have so many voicemails? This is just crazy*. Of course everybody had been calling because they thought I was on the trip.

That day of the plane crash, President Clinton comes over to the Department of Commerce to address the political appointees. All the White House press was there. I'm sitting in the audience and President Clinton starts to speak and as he's speaking I completely lose it. I had tears coming

down my cheeks and finally I was so inconsolable, I had my head in my hands sobbing. There was a friend sitting next to me in the auditorium at the Commerce Department who put her arm around me to console me and right at the time she did that the *New York Times* took a picture. That picture appeared the next day on the front page of the *New York Times*. It identified me, and at that point a lot of my friends who hadn't been able to reach me knew that I was OK because they had seen the picture in the *New York Times* or heard about it.

But let me tell you the thing that really got me about that day.

[BREAK]

Lindskog: OK, we're going.

Frazier: One of the things I was most touched by around the death of Ron Brown was that the President came over and spoke to us. My phone rang after the President left and the Senator was on the phone and he said, "First of all I want to tell you I'm really sorry, because I know that Ron was a good friend to you, as he was to me, and he was a mentor to you, and this is a tough time for all of us. I'm going to come by in about 15 minutes and I'm going to pick you up and I want you to come with me." I said, "OK, Senator" and hung up the phone. Sure enough, 15 minutes later his car pulls in front of the Department of Commerce, and in the car is his driver, the Senator, and Ethel Kennedy. The Senator said, "Look, I think this is a time where we need to go and have prayer." So we drove to this church out in Virginia, a very small Catholic church. I couldn't even tell you where it was. When we get out of the car this priest greets us there. The priest did a mass for Ron Brown and there was just the Senator and Mrs. Ethel Kennedy, me, and the driver. We sat while he went through this whole mass in Ron Brown's name.

After the mass ended the Senator sat with me for a little while and said, "There are just some things in life that are unexplained. I wish I had an answer for you, Mike, about this. But I don't. You and I have gone through so much with Ron, all that he meant to us. There are just no answers. Sometimes we all go through difficult periods of life. And this is one of them for both of us." We sat and talked in that church for a little while and then got in the car. He brought me back into town and that was the end of the day. It was one of the most moving things that I've ever experienced from somebody.

I wouldn't lead anyone to believe that I am a personal friend of Ted Kennedy. I worked for him, but I know that I'm part of his family. What made me completely aware of that is that despite the fact that I had been away from him for a few years, he took the time out of his schedule to come and get me, to arrange for this mass, and to sit and talk with me afterward about us both losing a good friend. That was all that I needed to know that I was part of his family. It was just such a touching time. It was probably something that helped me get through that much easier than had it not happened, because I knew I was dealing with somebody who was also very close to Ron, Secretary Brown.

That's the kind of person the Senator is. He's not your buddy you call up and say, "Let's go have a drink." He has that set of friends. I think he is the kind of person who says, "Look, in a time of adversity if I can help you. I'm there for you." That says a lot, particularly with all that he's got going on in his life with his own kids, with his extended family, with Robert Kennedy's kids, with Caroline Kennedy, and all that that's about. The other thing about him is when he faces a time of adversity he tends to turn to people he feels that he can trust, who have been there for him, who have been a part of his family.

The example I'm leading to is when Mrs. Onassis died. That was very public. I think the country grieved. The Senator called on a certain group of us to put together the funeral arrangements in a very dignified way. They had to be done in a way in which the public would be able to participate in a certain way, but yet it still maintained and preserved the dignity of the family. When Mrs. Onassis died, I got called and asked if I would help with the funeral. I'm not going to say no. I said, "Of course." This was while I was still at the Department of Commerce, and working for Secretary Brown at the time. I was responsible for when the plane landed, after they'd done the funeral service in New York City. The plane was coming to Washington for the burial, as you know at Arlington Cemetery beside President Kennedy. I was responsible for President Clinton's motorcade, because he was coming from the White House to greet the plane. I was in charge of the whole piece of the plane landing, the removal of the casket, putting it into the hearse for the ride to Arlington Cemetery, and the whole procession from National Airport to the cemetery. People were lined up on both sides of that highway. I wanted to do that, because I had that experience, number one, and number two, I was more than happy to do it.

There was that piece and then from my résumé probably you know that I was Assistant Secretary of Transportation.

Knott: Right.

Frazier: For Government Affairs. Of course it was a really tough time for the Senator when John [Kennedy] Junior's plane went down. Because of my role at the Department I was both a conduit to the FAA [Federal Aviation Administration] when they were trying to find the plane and then to the Coast Guard, which at that time was still part of the Department of Transportation. I was a conduit for the recovery piece of it, when they were looking for John Junior's body.

I was a back channel. I would talk to the office and the Senator would ask this or ask that and I would try to go to the FAA to get an answer, or I would go to the Coast Guard and get a back channel answer. And there was that whole thing about television cameras and helicopters flying, and trying to get the FAA to deal with that and be very dignified. It was a really hard time for him to lose somebody who was so near and dear to him. It was an incredibly tough time. I was certainly going to be there for him like he was for me.

As I talk to you more, more comes to me, like when I was Assistant Secretary of Transportation and Senator [John] McCain, who was then chairing the Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee, decided that he didn't like the funding that was going to the Big Dig in Boston, and wanted to stop it. I get a phone call from the Senator, "We need to talk with the Secretary. We can't let this happen. We've got to finish the Big Dig." I said, "OK, how do you want to

proceed?" He said, "Well, I think you need to get all of us together—" All of us meaning the Massachusetts delegation— "with the Secretary and try to figure out how we can get the Federal Highway Administration to keep money flowing to finish the Big Dig. We can't stop now just because McCain doesn't like it."

For four months on a weekly basis, we met. [John Joseph] Joe Moakley was still alive and was still dean of the Massachusetts delegation. The Secretary, the Federal Highway Administrator, and I were going to Joe Moakley's office every week, and sitting down with the entire delegation to talk about how we can beat back this effort to stop the funding for the Big Dig. We did, with the help of then Secretary Rodney Slater. We were able to stop that from happening, which McCain was trying to do. They ended up getting all the funding they needed from the Highway Administration to bring it to fruition, thank goodness.

It was tough during these meetings with the Mass. delegation, because even though I knew all the members, but I was very clearly identified as the Kennedy guy. That's OK, and at this particular time it was helpful. I was always trying to give him the edge. They'd see me there and they'd look at me, one eye open and one eye closed, "Yes, you're Kennedy's guy, we'll be reading a press release in the *Boston Globe* tomorrow. You'll feed something to Kennedy and he'll go to the press with it." Hey, I didn't mind.

When President Clinton was kind enough to nominate me and I had to go for my hearing on Capitol Hill before the Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee to be voted on by the Committee, a lot of my friends and family came into town for that. My mother was there and my sister. Ted Kennedy came over and introduced me to that Committee. He came over and sat at that table at the dais and introduced me to the full Committee and then I spoke and then they voted on me, 98-0, it was a unanimous vote in the Senate for me to be Assistant Secretary. But he was right there to do that introduction.

Knott: That's great.

Frazier: That's the kind of guy he is. He's just there for you. Sometimes when you ask him to be and sometimes when you least expect it.

Knott: Well, great.

Frazier: You have anything else?

Knott: I think we've hit the high notes. This has been a terrific interview. Thank you.

Lindskog: Thank you very much.

Frazier: Well, thank you. I hope I've hit a lot. There's stuff I just forget. I wish I could just tell you about the times when you're sitting there across from Ted Kennedy and Coretta Scott King is sitting in that chair and you're talking about whatever.

Knott: Well, Mike, in several months you're going to get this transcript. If something comes to you between now and then, we always tell people just write it in. Just write it into the transcript if there's something that you've forgotten.

[BREAK]

Frazier: There was the morning that Len Bias overdosed, do you remember that?

Knott: Yes, I certainly do.

Frazier: You remember that? I don't know how old you are.

Lindskog: Well, I'm a Celtics fan.

Knott: It's a little before his time.

Frazier: Oh, you're a Celtics fan. You're from New England too?

Lindskog: Yes, Connecticut and Massachusetts.

Frazier: OK, all right, great. The morning of the Len Bias overdose, we were at the Senator's house. He was living still in McLean, at 636 Chain Bridge Road. We were having a breakfast meeting with Reverend Jesse Jackson. There was Jackson, the Senator, one other person, and me sitting on the patio having breakfast. The meeting was about some civil rights issue that we were dealing with. Somebody called and said, "Did you see the news?" We said, "No, we're doing this meeting, why?" And they said, "Len Bias just was declared dead of cocaine overdose." A couple of us thought that it was an April Fool's trick. It wasn't April Fool's Day, but we still thought it was a joke. Then we got to the office and learned that it was true.

I'll never forget that, because somebody said something at the table, and Kennedy looked at Jackson, and Jackson looked at Kennedy, we were stunned. This kid had such a future. Who would have ever thought?

And also when you get a chance, ask somebody that you interview at some point down the road, about Kennedy singing "Jalisco." Remember we were talking about that?

Knott: "Jalisco"? No.

Frazier: Yes, I guess when the Senator was a kid, just a real little kid, his parents took him to Mexico. There's a state in Mexico called Jalisco and when he went to Mexico he learned this song "Jalisco." So he thinks, because he learned this song "Jalisco," whenever he's in a Hispanic crowd he thinks it's a great thing to sing. I'm with the Senator in Chicago. He's campaigning for a guy who's running for the mayor of Chicago. [Richard J.] Daley has now died and Harold Washington is running for mayor of Chicago. Kennedy goes to Chicago to campaign for Harold Washington. One of the events that we're doing is in a Hispanic community, because Washington needs votes there too. Kennedy gets to the event and he tells me, "I want you to get me a Mexican band, and I want you to get me a sombrero." I said, "Are you sure you want to do this? Because there's going to be press there." He said, "Mike, trust me, this is going to be a great event." So we go to this event and there's a huge crowd, and this guy comes in with this

sombrero. Now I thought it was going to be like a regular sombrero. Instead it was this giant sombrero.

Kennedy doesn't miss a beat. Puts the sombrero on and cues the band. He looks at the band and says, "Play along with me." He starts singing this song "Jalisco" in an Irish brogue. People are laughing and clapping and having a good time, but they're all looking at each other like "This doesn't sound anything like—" He sang the whole thing. He was very proud of himself. Now the Senator, you know what size he is, and I don't know if you remember the former mayor of Chicago, Harold Washington, but he was also a big guy. Here you had this African-American with this giant sombrero on and this Irishman with his giant sombrero on. Kennedy's singing "Jalisco" and Washington doesn't know the words, but he's trying to sing along. And I'm telling you—if you could have watched the news that night in Chicago!

Knott: We have to get this footage.

Frazier: You would have thought this was—it was unbelievable. The newspapers had pictures on the front page of the newspapers, both of them. The *Chicago Sun-Times* and the *Tribune* and I think both of them actually had Washington and Kennedy with these giant sombreros on the front page of both. It was in the news too. If you can get a clip—you have to get a clip of this, because it's just hilarious.

Knott: Great. Thanks, Mike.